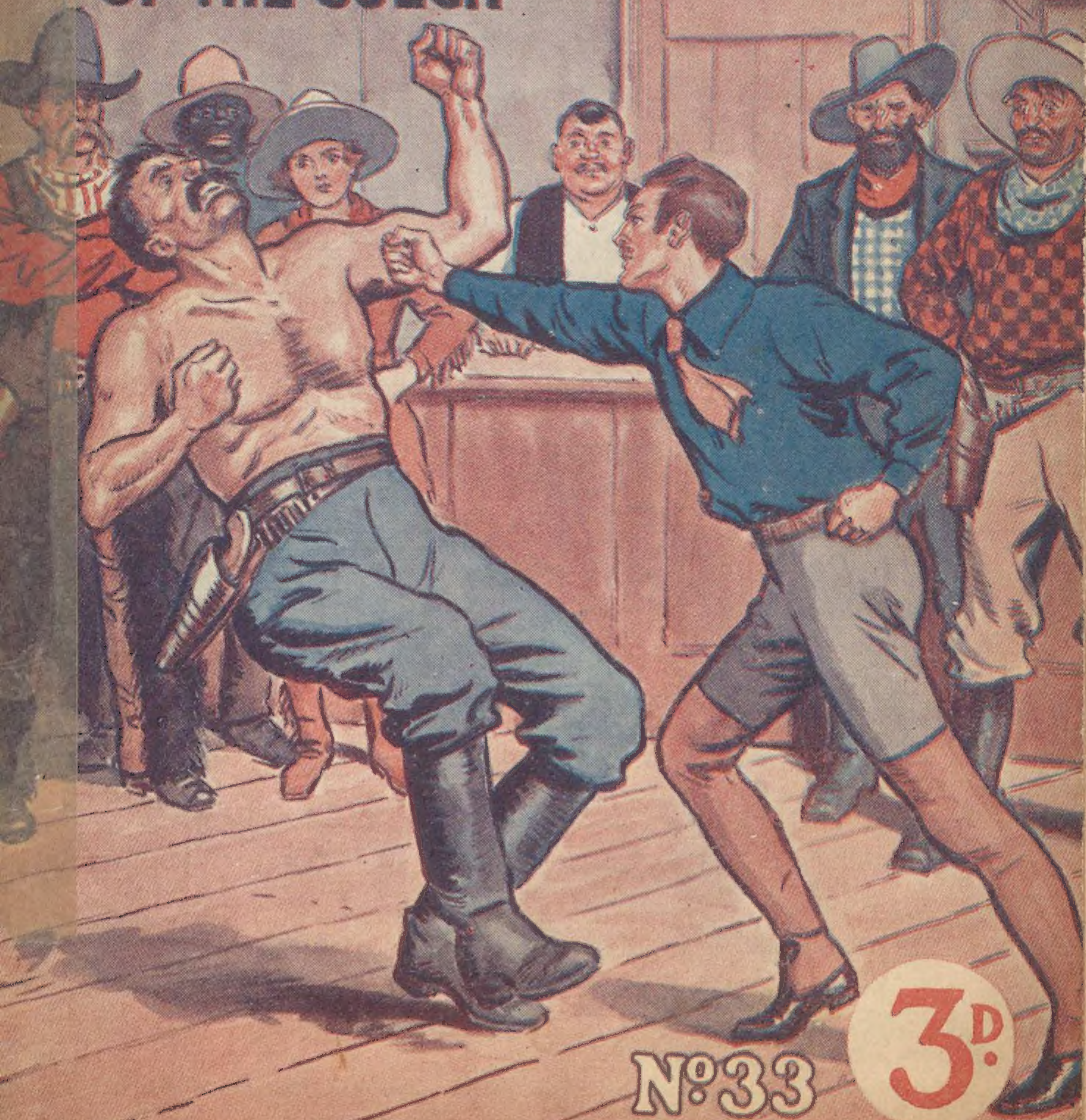


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THE KNIGHT OF THE GULCH

CHAPTER I

"THE LITTLE BROWN JUG"

LOCATION—Deadwood City.

Time—half-past nine of a dark mid-summer's night, when the heavens were hooded in skurrying clouds, and the air was sultry and close.

Place—"The Little Brown Jug," a combination of saloon, tavern and miner's club-room, at the upper end of the main street in Deadwood Gulch, kept by an individual who styled himself Kentucky Jake.

Scene—a matter of eight or ten men gathered around, some seated and some standing—men generally rough in appearance, curiosities in expression of countenance and cast of features, inasmuch as no one resembled any other.

First might be noticed for consideration, the cinnamon-haired proprietor of the "Jug," Kentucky Jake. A six-footer was he with a broad chest and brawny limbs, incased to the knees in top-boots, while a heavy beard swept to his belt.

He sat behind the bar, upon a high stool, where he kept an eye upon the throng, and acted as cashier, while two boys served out the beverages.

The burly individual, with the bald head, and ludicrous cast of features—the chap who sits in a huge arm-chair with his heels elevated upon the deal table, that's Colonel Bill Stokes, a veteran of the Black Hills, and likewise, one of its pioneers.

Those two individuals at yonder deal table—the good-natured looking Dutchman and the fop, with his hair parted in the middle, and eye-glasses affixed to the bridge of his nose—they are lights of the legal fraternity in Deadwood, respectively "Judge" Jake Schriner, and Adolphus Syringus Cole.

Then, there are three rough, long-bearded, blear-eyed toughs, loafing upon a long settee, smoking their pipes, and watching every arrival and departure—men with evil-expressed faces, and a superabundance of belt weapons, which classed them among that lawless type who fight and shoot at pleasure. The names of these men were respectively, Hayseed Jim, Holy Moses, and Popular Pete, and each has won notoriety in Black Hills history.

The man who is pacing up and down the room, looking as fierce as a tiger out of his jungle, is the pard and leader of the toughs, whose name is Hickory Hank, otherwise Captain Hickory.

He is a wolfish-looking ruffian, with terrible blood-shot eyes, a dusky, villainous cast of countenance, and a heavy black moustache to lend him an appearance of the brigandish. He is a large, powerful man, with limbs of iron, and a deep chest of enormous muscles.

Ha! here is another we have missed—a personage, beardless as a boy, sitting perched upon one end of the bar in lieu of a better seat, engaged in puffing a cigar, and watching the ruffian as he paces up and down the room.

This is a character almost as well known in the West as the eccentric Calamity Jane, whom she resembles only in the faultlessness of her form, for her face is more prepossessing, her eyes bright and her manner a trifle more cool.

Her name is Baltimore Bess.

Now, one more figure makes our tableau complete.

This is the man of massive trunk and limb, who stands in a retired corner, half leaning upon his rifle, while he strokes his blonde moustache with one hand, at the same time watching those about him with an eagle glance from his blue eyes. Though not exactly a handsome man he is a brave one, and is well known as Persimmon Bill—a hero of as many daring exploits as those which have made Buffalo Bill famous.

Kentucky Jake is listening to a conversation carried on between Colonel Bill and Judge Jacob, while he occasionally scratches his head as if tucking away a bit of valuable gossip in his large cranium, with its shock of cinnamon hair.

"I tell ye w'at, Judge!" the colonel was saying as he lit a fresh cigar, "my opinyoun o' thet Munro Malvern ain't none o' the best, barin' he hain't never done me any purtick'ler harm. He allus 'peared ter hev a sneakish expression in his eyes when a feller luks squar' inter 'em, an' I don't allow he's got any great beauty to brag on. Well, you see, this Munro Malvern, who cum among us an' opened up the Big Bullion, come by the papers o' ther lease in a manner

that warn't direct honest, I calkylate, an' w'en he struck et rich everybody war sorry, because he ain't no favourite heer in Deadwood. Now, hyar turns up a new customer—a good-looker, he ar', too—who sez the mine's his, and he's going to have it, hit or miss. I'll bet he's a gallus coon, ef he ain't much more'n a younker, an' ef he'll h'ist Munro Malvern out o' ther Big Bullion, I'll give him this hayr right paw o' mine to shake as long's he's got ther grip—that's here, Colonel Bill Stokes, ther beauty o' ther mines!"

The miners gave a responding cheer, for the sentiments of the veteran were exactly their own.

Hickory Hank and his pals were the only ones who didn't participate in the enthusiasm.

"I'll bet my head thar'll a passel o' ye galoots go ter Sulphur City afore Munro Malvern drops his king pin!" the rough said, with a peculiar laugh. "He's got more'n money enough ter buy substitutes fer a few sech as you."

"Then I suppose he classes you among his purchased friends, Sir Tough!" exclaimed a ringing voice, and a new-comer stepped within the scene. "You, I presume, are his counsellor and legal adviser!"

Hickory Hank growled, as he wheeled about to confront the stranger, who stood regarding him with a keen, unflinching gaze.

"Hey? Waal, I reckon when the boss wants me I'm generally around handy, younker. But, who're you? What bizness is it of yours who I am?"

"In the second place, it isn't the smallest part of my business to answer questions propounded by a tool of Munro Malvern!" the new comer replied, coolly, as he folded his arms and returned the ruffian's stare.

"In the first place, which I have left for the last, I think you'll find my autograph written in the hotel register at the Metropolitan Hotel; or, if your pedal extremities are too weak and weary to do the difference between me and the Met, you may call me by the name of my original Black Hills baptism—*Rosebud Rob*—'a man to suit all circumstances.' Sorry I haven't a visiting-card for you, 'pon honour."

The speaker was an individual of an age just in the promise of dawning manhood, with a form that, though erect and slim, was closely knit and compact as iron, as was attested by the quickness in every move, and by the swell of the various muscles. His face was a handsome one, the skin being pure, and the features quite perfect. The eyes were brown and of a penetrating cast, and the hair of the same hue, while he wore a slight moustache, and "sides" along down in the front of either ear.

He was dressed in neatly-fitting pants of some greyish stuff, and these were in turn met at the waist by a blue miner's shirt, with broad collar, and a belt around the waist, bearing upon it in large gold letters the name—

"ROSEBUD ROB."

A jauntily-slouched black hat was upon his head, and patent-leather boots upon his feet, the leathern leggings reaching above his knees.

By this time Rosebud Rob had stared the ruffian out of countenance, and with a cool laugh sauntered toward the bar, against which he leaned, with a graceful pose, as he glanced about the room.

"Hain't seen a chap in here by the cognominious appellation of Munro Malvern, have you, gentlemen?" he said, presently, as he lit a fresh cigar.

"Nary a time, stranger!" the colonel made bold to answer. "I don't allow thet Munro Malvern hes any desire ter git inter ther Jug, bein's we ain't got no purtick'ler luv for him, in purtick'ler, ef I know et."

"Oh! is that so? Well, then add my affection in with yours, in that respect!" Rosebud Rob replied, with a laugh.

"Then you don't luv ther owner of the Big Bullion mine?"

"If you mean Munro Malvern, *no!* No, a thousand times. Perhaps if you were to tell him that Rosebud Rob, the Dandy, Sport, and Man to Suit all Circumstances, hated him, he'd be surprised, as I dare say he never heard of the above-mentioned individual. But he shall know me, ere long! ha! ha! Yes; he shall know me. Good-evening, gentlemen: if I have disturbed you, pray pardon me," and the Sport began to move toward the door.

But he paused involuntarily, when Baltimore Bess slid down from her seat upon the bar.

"Hold up, pard!" she said, thrusting out a fair, faultless hand: "jest gripe thet paw before ye go, and count on Baltimore Bess as yours truly!"

"What! a woman in these strange surroundings?" the Sport gasped, gazing sharply at the strange girl—"a woman in men's garb?"

"Waal, now, you chalk et squar', pardner, thet I am jest about one o' them 'ar same, an' no mistakes. 'Spect ye calkylate a female ken't wear breeches, an' be a fu'st class article, eh? Jest ax old Beauty, yonder, an' he'll give ye my pedigree, so fur as he knows."

"Yes, ye purty much bet we kin, stranger!" Colonel Bill made haste to say, as he rose and limped forward by the aid of his crooked cane. "Thet ar' Baltimore Bess aint' no flunk, ner no slouch, an' don't ye fureget it. She ar' made o' stiff timber,

an' when ye ketch her sleepin' thru' a sermon, jest let me know!"

"I am glad to know it, sir, and I thank you, miss, for your proffered friendship. Believe me, I shall not forget you. For the present, however, *au revoir*!"

And in a moment more the dandy was gone from the "Jug."

CHAPTER II

A STRANGE VISITOR

MUNRO MALVERN was classed among the wealthiest men in Deadwood City.

He had come there a man of no particular importance, and, as was supposed, purchasing the claim, now known as the Big Bullion mine, had opened it up on a large scale, and as a result it yielded the greatest per cent. of gold of any mine in that section of the Black Hills.

His residence in Deadwood Gulch was of modern style of architecture, with every convenience attached, and the few who had ever been inside it pronounced it a palace, compared with the other dwellings in the Golden City.

On this same night of our opening scene in the "Little Brown Jug," the owner of all this magnificent residence sat reading a local paper by the light of a shaded lamp, while he smoked a scented cigar.

He was a man of between forty-five and fifty years, but as well preserved as though he were but thirty. His face was whiter than robust health would warrant, where it was not covered by a jetty beard, and his eyes had a treacherous, snake-like gleam, calculated to represent a sinister nature—a man born to plot evil, and scheme deeply to accomplish his own plans.

As his glittering gaze swept over the lines on the paper, a confident expression hovered about his lips, finally breaking into a triumphant smile.

"All my plans and financial schemes work like a charm!" he muttered, blowing a cloud of smoke upward, and watching it dissolve into space. "When I came here to this rough place, over a year ago, I had not a hundred dollars to my name, while here, now, the papers estimate me worth over a million of dollars, and compliment me as the most go-ahead and successful speculator in the Black Hills country. How sweet is the fascination of flattery! Ha! ha! ha! especially when one deserves it, as I do. Ha! ha! ha! *Why* do I not deserve it? Humph! things are working in an open groove, and it is about time for me to be casting about for one of the opposite sex, with whom to form a copartnership. I do not think I am yet too old to swing in double harness, if I can only find the right butterfly!"

"Haw! haw! Unky; so you think you are capable of catching butterfly belles yet, eh?" laughed a cool voice.

Munro Malvern wheeled about with a startled exclamation, then smiled as he saw the stalwart, black-moustached young man who stood in a careless attitude, just within the door.

"Oh! it's you, eh? Come in, Ralph, and be seated. So you overheard my soliloquy? Well, yes, I flatter myself that there are many women who would not despise the idea of marrying me, with my youthful appearance and the Big Bullion mine to back it."

"Ha! ha! ha! Very true, Unky, and as your stepson, let me congratulate you on your awakening to the fact!" the other replied, elevating his heels to the corner of a book-case, and settling comfortably back into his chair, to enjoy a cigar.

"I dare say you have already cast your eye upon some piece of calico, whom you would be pleased to make Mrs. Munro Malvern."

"No, Ralph, it has not come to that yet, that I am aware of. There is but one woman in Deadwood that I'd give a snap of my finger for, and even she has long ago refused to open her doors to me."

"Ah! whom do you mean?" and Ralph Lamont elevated his brows as an indication of surprise.

"Her name is Jessie Mapleton!" the millionaire replied, an evil light flickering in his eyes.

"Phew! not the little washerwoman who holds out down the gulch?"

"The same. She has a wicked temper, albeit she is but eighteen years of age."

"And, old maid-like, prefers to be independent and work for her own living, rather than depend upon the charities of an unscrupulous millionaire, eh?"

"It seems so, Ralph—but you do me a great injustice in calling me unscrupulous, when you know I am strictly honest, like yourself"—with a shrug of the shoulders, and a hoarse chuckle.

"Ha! ha! Good joke. Of course you're a paragon of honesty and integrity, Unky. But how is it that the little competitor of our Chinese nation is down on you?"

"Oh! there was a slight matter of business between myself and her father, concerning his right to a controlling share of the Big Thunder gulch claim, and when the old man suddenly skipped out of Deadwood she accused me of conniving at his disappearance. Naturally, I arranged matters so as to control the mine, giving her a dividend sufficient to satisfy any one but a sanguinary personage."

"And she kicked, eh?"

"Exactly!—kicked me out of the house, when I went to make her an offer. But, curse her, she shall yet feel my power—I have sworn it."

"Ha! ha! The girl is a brick, after all, and as I am about to make a *debut* into her graces, Unky, I trust, for the sake of the late lamented Mrs. Malvern, who was my mother, that you will the lapels of your plethoric purse once more open, and make me a liberal donation!"

"What? Why, you rascal, it was only last week I gave you a couple thousand to invest in a mining scheme. Where has that gone?"

"Evaporated, Unky—actually evaporated—gone into the cash till of Charlie Baggs's money-drawer, where bills of so large a denomination are usually deposited. Faro took it all."

"Then you may go penniless. I am not obliged to support you. If you want more money, you must work for it. The girl, Jessie Mapleton, must and shall be my wife, so that I can tame her——"

"But, hold up! You're encroaching upon my cornfield. I have already made her acquaintance, and mean to go ahead at once into her graces."

"The deuce! It must not be. The girl shall be *my* wife, if I have to spend every dollar I have. Do you hear? You must not interfere, except as I direct. What do you care about her? Bah! nothing—absolutely nothing. There are a thousand better than she for *you* to pick up. What you want, is money to make you a silent partner to my individual schemes."

"Bully boy! Unky, you've just hit the nail upon the financial head. Shake! I'm your accommodating step-son, just so long as the jingle of coin produces music from the depths of my pockets."

"Very good. You shall be well paid, if you serve my will. However, I shall not advance you money until you perform your part. Here is what you have to work on:

"This man Mapleton is dead, and his daughter believes me his murderer, or in some way connected with his disappearance. She must be persuaded differently. Here is a letter I once received from Mapleton; you are a skilled penman, and must forge a letter purporting to be from the old man, somewhere up in Washington territory, where we will suppose he is engaged in prospecting. In the letter I must be thoroughly exculpated, and lauded with praises. Do you see? It will be easy for the supposed writer to say in the letter that he, Mapleton, having become deeply involved, it was necessary for him to fly for safety, and that it was only through the leniency of Munro Malvern that he escaped a violent death, etc., etc."

"Phew! you old scheming rascal!" the dutiful stepson exclaimed, as he ran his fingers through his hair, meditatively; "so *that's* your game, eh? Well, I don't see as I can do less than follow your orders. So give me pen and ink and paper, and cigars and wine, and then leave me, and I will try my hand."

Without a word Munro Malvern set forth the required articles, and stepped into an adjoining room, furnished nearly the same as his library.

In the course of an hour he returned and found Lamont idly engaged in emptying the wine bottle.

"Well! have you done?"

"Exactly. Please examine," and he tossed a sheet of paper on the table.

"It has been done grandly!" Malvern replied, as he ran over it. "Here is a hundred dollars for your pains. Now, then, I want you to deliver this to Jessie Mapleton, and tell her you received it from her father up in Washington Territory, but had quite forgotten about it on your first meeting. You are then to take your leave. Of course the letter will produce its effect, and in time I will call upon the girl. Do you see? And if I win her——"

"Exactly! If you win her, what then?"

"I'll make you richer by five thousand dollars!"

"Hurrah! that's me to a dot! The thing is settled. The girl shall marry you, or I'll go drown her in Whitewood creek, as sure's my name is Ralph Waldo Emerson Lamont!"

And seizing the forged letter, the dutiful stepson made a hurried exit.

After his departure Munro Malvern sat for some time absorbed in a brown study, while he smoked innumerable cigars.

"The girl must be the third woman who has taken my name," he muttered. "Ha! ha! what pleasure it will give me to tame her, as the buchario does the wild cayuse! Not that I care for her any more than does Lamont, but I am anxious to break and subdue her strong, independent spirit. I think I can trust Ralph, as long as I feed him with money. Ah, Brass!"—to the servant who entered, bearing a silver card-receiver—"what now?"

"A gallus gentleman, Mr. Malvern, who sends up his card."

"Humph! I wonder who?" the speculator muttered, as he took the delicate card from which arose a delicate perfume of white-lily. "Few of these illiterate denizens of the mines boast of cards in their calls. Ha! and such a name—Rosebud Rob! Wonder what and who *he* is? Yes, Brass, you may show him up."

"No, Brass, you are let out of that job,

for I have come of my own accord. You may retire, however!" announced a voice that, though pleasant, was sarcastically cool.

And there stood Rosebud Rob, just within the portals.

Nearly frightened out of his wits, Brass made an abrupt plunge out of the room, and Munro Malvern was alone with his visitor.

Rosebud Rob came gracefully forward, and coolly accepted the chair but recently occupied by Lamont. Since his visit to the "Little Brown Jug" he had made a general change of wearing apparel, and looked even more the dandy sport of the mines than before.

"Well?" Munro Malvern said, as he surveyed his caller, "of what service can I be to you, sir?"

"Eh? What *service* can you be to me?" the Sport repeated, as he lit a cigar. "Well, let me see. You read my name on the card there?"

"I did, and a very strange name it is, too."

"Humph! yes, when you've a mind to think so. Emanated, you see, from a personal peculiarity of mine, of always carrying for an emblem, a budding rose, pinned to my coat. Sometimes, of course, I have to substitute an artificial one, when the cold snows of winter are low over the graves of the dead and unavenged."

The millionaire started violently, and gave the Sport a quick, searching glance.

But that personage was engaged in knocking the ashes from the end of his cigar, evidently unconscious of the effect of his words.

"By Heaven! I am glad it was not an intentional stab," the speculator muttered, under his breath. Then, aloud, he added:

"I suppose you have another name, sir, in addition to the *nom de plume* you have assumed?"

"Of course I have another, which I use on private occasions. Perhaps it is a name you have heard of before, since my father was once your partner in business transactions. My name chances to be the same as his—Robert Mapleton, at your service."

"Robert Mapleton!" the millionaire gasped leaping to his feet with a colourless face—"Robert Mapleton?"

"That's what I said. Can't you hear? Robert Mapleton, or Rosebud Rob, for short—a chap purty much calculated to suit all circumstances, you see?"

It was several seconds before the mine-owner could control his agitation, then he reseated himself.

"Well," the Sport remarked, with a quizzical smile, "the announcement that I was Robert Mapleton, Esquire, seemed to cause you considerable emotion."

"Yes, indeed, young man. The name came down upon me so suddenly, that I was little else than overpowered by strange memories. If you are the son of Robert Mapleton, know then that he and I were boon companions, and sworn friends. When he suddenly was taken off, it seemed to me I had lost my own brother."

"How long ago was it the old gentleman took his departure from this earthly tabernacle?" asked Rosebud Rob.

"Over a year ago. It is strange that you should have forgotten it, if you were in communication with him."

"Well, you see how it was, the old gentleman and I were not on very excellent terms, as it chanced. In early youth I manifested a reckless, roving disposition, and one day when I attempted to do Shakspearean characters in the horse-barn, the unkindly sire furnished the necessary adjuncts with a horsewhip. My ambitious spirit was set on fire, as well as the sensations in the back of my waistcoat, and bidding the old homestead an affectionate adieu, I wended my way down the old country road leading out into the world.

"For several years I battled with grim death in all its phases, and occupied positions in almost every trade and profession extant. Chancing to be out in this latitude of the hemisphere, and having been apprised that the governor had hied himself hitherward, I thought I'd call around and see him."

"Well, sir, you came too late. From all we can learn, Robert Mapleton, Sr., has been in his grave a matter of fourteen months."

"And did he leave any wealth behind?"

"Not a copper. He died insolvent, having been very unfortunate in his speculations, and his creditors mourn his loss!" the millionaire said, with a peculiar, rasping laugh.

"Poor fellow! Poor, poor fellow!" Rosebud Rob sighed. "How very sad to contemplate!"

"But, perhaps I have wearied you, Mr. Malvern, and I will retire. We will talk again upon this subject. *Au revoir!*" And with a meek courtesy, the Dandy Sport arose and abruptly left the room.

CHAPTER III

HICKORY HANK ON HAND

PERHAPS, reader, you have heard of the Jardin Mabile of Deadwood City. If not, you have but to inquire, and any citizen of that notorious city can locate it for you if you wish to pay it a visit.

A scene of our romance calls us thither, and we go as an eye-witness of a picture peculiar in itself and confined to the mining-regions.

It is a place with a wooden front, but after you pass through the portals, you find yourself in a canvas-roofed garden, with sidings of rough boards, and lit by flaring blazes of benzine-gas from overhanging burners.

The garden is used for a variety of purposes, being large and commodious, with a substantial flooring.

Here is a long bar at one side, with a villainous-looking chap behind it in his shirt-sleeves, and behind him still a glittering array of bottles, decanters, glasses and mirrors.

Yonder is a space allotted to dancers, and here is a number of tables, ever surrounded with gamesters who deal the brace and fleece newcomers out of their money on a variety of games of chance.

Yonder, at the farther end of the room, is a small rostrum, furnished with a drop-curtain, and from this direction, the crowds that flock to the Jardin Mabilie are generally greeted nightly by a song from some person, hired for the purpose, by the enterprising proprietors.

Several nights after the scene just pictured in a preceding chapter, the Mabilie was packed almost to suffocation with rough miners and rougher desperadoes from the surrounding gold districts.

A star was booked upon the boards of the Jardin Mabilie to-night—one Bel Helene, a dead shot with the pistol—and, therefore, the crowds flocked in.

Many were the conjectures concerning her, among the crowd, some of which were amusing to hear.

"Purty!" said one burly bull-driver, with an impious expletive. "Why, she lays anything in the shade that evyer stood on high-heeled gaiters, you bet! See'd her down at McDannell's Bella Union in 'Shian, I did, you heer me, ther Wolf o' Wyoming, an' she ar' jes' as purty as——"

"Me!" exclaimed a voice, and Colonel Bill Stokes ushered himself into the circle; "fer they do say thet I am actooally the handsomest galoot as ever sot stogy on the Black Hills soil. Why, feller-citizens, I tuk ther gold medal fer sublime beauty at ther late memorable Centenyal—fact, I'll sw'ar to et!"

A boisterous laugh followed the colonel's assertion, and no one offered to dispute the fact that he attempted to establish, for Bill was an authority in correctness, belonging to the firm of Schriner & Co., attorneys and legal adjusters.

Close behind him followed the ever-present "Judge" Jacob, accompanied by his faithful clerk, Adolphus Syringus Cole, the *top*.

"Hayr we ar', ther hull legal fraternity

o' Schriner & Co.; so dish up yer amusement!" the colonel yelled, as he limped along with the aid of his heavy cane. "Hello! ef hayr ain't the galoot they call Rosebud Rob! Shake, ye galoot!"

"Certainly!" the Sport replied, as he extended his hand; "glad to meet you. Quite a crowd to-night."

"Spirit of old Methus'ler, yes. Mr Rosebud, make ye acquainted with 'Judge' Jacob Schriner, uv ther legal bar—also, Mr. Adolphus Syringus Cole, cleark o' common fleas."

"Aw! *Pleas*, sir, *PLEAS*!" Adolphus interrupted, in an affected drawl.

"Happy to meet you, gentlemen!" Rosebud Rob replied, bowing. "I hope you will enjoy yourselves!" and with this remark the Sport strolled away.

As he strolled toward the rostrum he espied a piano, the instrument which furnished music for the dance, and without a request from anybody he sat down and ran his fingers dexterously over the keys, calling forth a strange, weird harmony of sound. Then he struck off into a lively quickstep, which filled the garden with exquisite sounds of melody.

Involuntarily the crowd surged around him and everything became quiet, as the roughs and miners listened with keen appreciation.

Such playing had never been heard before within the walls of the Jardin Mabilie, and the roughest, most uncultivated spirit could but pause from revelry to listen, entranced, to the beautiful music.

Hickory Hank and his gang stood back near the bar, and the ruffian leader watched the Sport with an evil glare in his terrible eyes.

While he gazed thus he felt a touch upon his shoulder, and wheeling about with a grunt, he came face to face with Munro Malvern.

The mine-owner raised the gold-headed cane to his lips to enjoin silence upon catching Hickory Hank's glance, and, turning abruptly, left the place.

The ruffian leader followed him a few minutes later and they met in a dark shadow of the mountain walls, which towered above the gulch like grim phantoms, where the moonlight shot in bars through the spectral pines.

"Ah! is that you?" the millionaire said, as the ruffian came up. "I am glad that you came. Have you been drinking heavily?"

"No; haven't had half a dozen snifters to-day."

"All the better for my purpose. You saw the dandy devil who was arousing the spirits out of that piano—the individual who styles himself Rosebud Rob?"

"Shedn't wonder ef I'd cast my eye at him!" was the gruff response.

"And what is your opinion of him?"

"Thet he ain't no slouch. He's got thunder, lightnin', an' a hull volcano tucked under that white vest of his'n."

"Ha! ha! then you're afraid of him?"

"Did I say so?"

"Not exactly. Anyhow, I want you to pick a quarrel with him somehow, and you're certainly a hard customer to handle, so you can easily get away with him."

"How much insurance ye goin' ter put on my life?"

"Oh! leave that to me. You shall be well paid if you do the job well."

"Do you want him knifed?"

"I'm not particular about that. Suit yourself."

And, with this understanding, the twain separated, entering the garden again soon after.

Rosebud Rob was still entertaining his rough audience upon the piano, and to the music of a lively waltz several had paired off, and were adding to the entertainment in terpsichorean revelry.

But the music was destined to cease as suddenly as it had begun.

Hickory Hank came elbowing his way through the crowd, backed as usual by his bull-dog pals, and advancing to the piano, he slammed the heavy lid down with an oath.

Rosebud Rob narrowly escaped having his hands smashed by the descending cover, and he leaped to his feet, a hot flush rioting over his countenance.

"What do you mean, you fool?" he cried, sharply. "Did you intend to jam my fingers?"

"Shet up, ye dandy galoot, ef ye don't want me ter make chow-chow out o' yer ear!" Captain Hickory cried, with a hoarse guffaw. "Reckon I'm purty much boss hyar, an' ef I want ter stop the music ther's nary galoot as sez I ken't!"

"So you think you're boss, eh?" Rosebud Rob said, coolly. "You're a big bullying bloat of a bull-dog, and I'm the very lad as kin back it."

A murmur of applause ran through the garden, for Captain Hickory was perhaps the most unpopular man among the mining class in the whole town, though there were few who cared to cross him.

"What! what! ye call me names, ye leetle imp?" the burly captain yelled, as soon as he could find his tongue, after the astonishment created by the words of the Sport—"ye dub Hickory Grim a bloat and er bull-dog?"

"I reckon I sed something of the kind," Rosebud Rob replied, with a provoking smile, "and I'll allow I didn't cum purty much out o' ther way. So if you are in for a fight, jest say the word, and you'll

find me the right man to suit this very circumstance. Come! don't be bashful about speaking up."

A loud cheer went up from the crowd.

Hickory Hank gave vent to a frightful curse, and, quick as thought, whipped a pair of revolvers from his belt, and cocked them, with an ominous click! click!

"Oh! ho! I'll show ye—ye leetle bantam rooster! I'll stop yer spoutin'—"

"Hold! Back, you cowardly dog! Would you shoot down a man who has no weapons?" cried a ringing voice, and Baltimore Bess leaped suddenly in upon the scene, clutching in hand a pair of revolvers full as imposing as those of the ruffian. And close at her heels came the blonde scout, Persimmon Bill, Colonel Bill Stokes, and Dutch Jake, the worthy "Judge"; seeing which, the miners every one whipped weapons from their belts.

"Curse ye!" Grim hissed, perceiving that the odds were heavily against him. "You and I shall yet hev a day o' reckonin', girl!"

"Shack 'em Jump-up! dot's fifteen hundred unt sixty-swi times ash dot pig loafer say dot same t'ing. Pessie!" affirmed the "Judge."

"I cave—I'm beat this time!" Grim said, restoring his weapons to his belt, and turning as if to go. "As fer you, ye bantam dandy, I'll bore a hole through your heart inside o' a week, or my name ain't Hank Grim!"

"But, hold on: don't be in such a hurry!" Rosebud Rob said coolly stepping in front of the ruffian and blockading his path. "I haven't got through with you, yet! You offered me an insult, and I never receive one of those *bon mots* without proper retaliation!"

"Hip! hip! hurrah!" cried Baltimore Bess, swinging her hat above her head; "thar's a lad fer ye, pilgrims—a reg'lar ourang-outang up-an'-down sport as is a brick, an' I'll bet high on his keerds, every time. Pull off yer shirt, Hankey, ye posey, and show us ef ye kin fight!"

"Ef the younker wants fight, let him pull his perforator, an' I'm ready!" Hickory Hank growled, reaching toward his belt.

"Hold up! I will not fight you with weapons other than those with which nature adorned us—fists! Them's my terms, an' ef ye ain't a coward ye'll come to the scratch!" cried Rosebud Rob, handing his hat to Baltimore Bess.

Grim began to strip without a word. Not so with Rosebud.

He simply discarded head covering, but retained all of his elegant garments. Fighting lines were chalked upon the floor by enthusiastic admirers, and in a few seconds the two antagonists faced each other.

"Are you ready?" demanded Rosebud, a moment later.

"Ready!" the border ruffian replied, hoarsely, a confident gleam in his eyes.

In an instant the men had squared off with clinched fists, toeing the chalk boundaries, over which there was no following.

Rosebud Rob looked insignificant in size to the ruffian; nor did he push the battle. He simply warded off the other's blows.

But in doing this he is simply biding his time; he is watching an opening for investment.

Ha! there! He strikes a blow in an unguarded moment, full in the face of Hickory Hank, and he goes reeling to the floor like a log.

He is up again in a moment, however, and on his guard, an ugly bruise under his left eye, the rapid swelling of which will soon render that member temporarily useless.

More sparring now, which is done creditably; then suddenly, there comes another resounding spat, and Grim again goes floorward, with a frightful yell.

His pals rush forward and would raise him to his feet, but find him utterly unconscious; while upon his forehead is the print of a human fist, in livid colouring.

"I think the game is over, gentlemen!" Rosebud Rob said, with a queer little laugh, while the garden reverberated with wild cheers from a hundred throats; "anyhow, I've given you a brief illustration of how Cinnamon Gulch pans out young lads. Now, then, is there any one else desirous of coming to see me on the same uncertain grounds?"

No one, evidently.

"Well, well, if there's no one confident I'll content myself with one victim, though I'd much rather a half-dozen had bothered me at the same time!"

And resuming the wearing of his hat, the Sport was about to take his leave, when the curtain rose from the little stage, and the manager of the Garden led out the star of the evening, Bel Helene, the Pistol Queen.

Instantly there was a wild shout, and clapping of hands, to which the young woman bowed graciously, after which she began her exhibition of marvellous target-shooting, with a revolver.

She was evidently not yet arrived at the majority age for woman—she looked even younger. Her form, however, was strikingly developed, and her face pretty as a picture, in its wreath of flossy golden hair, with a sweet, expressive mouth, and flashing eyes of blue. Her dress was of Spanish make, with short skirt and spangled leggings.

She went through with her performance with admirable skill and exactness, putting each bullet where it was intended to be sent.

Then, with another bow she retreated behind the scenes, amid ringing cheers from the motley assemblage.

And after she was gone the question seemed to pass generally from lip to lip—"Who is she?"

CHAPTER IV

SOME DIABOLICAL SCHEMING

BEL HELENE, the Pistol Queen, after performing her programme before the patrons of the Jardin Mabile, left the place by a rear exit, and with a dark cloak wrapped around her, hurried up the darker portions of the gulch, until she came to an unpretentious board shanty, over the door of which hung a squeaking sign, bearing the inscription:

"WASHING AND IRONING."

After hesitating a moment, she rapped upon the door and then waited breathlessly.

Sounds of some person stirring were heard inside, and then the door was opened by a fair-faced young woman, handsome of form, and with an expression of weariness hovering about her eyes and lips.

She started with a low cry, as she beheld Bel Helene!

"What! can it be possible—you, Nelly Austin?"

"'Sh! Yes, 'tis I, Jessie. I have come all the way to this rough, lawless country since we parted three years ago!"

There was no time for further explanation just then, for the two girls were locked in each other's embrace.

But later, after the first friendly greetings were over, and Bel Helene was seated beside her schoolmate of other days, she gave an explanation.

"Dear Jessie, you ask me what fetches me so far from the home of my birth. I can tell you a little, but not all. Since last we met, dear friend, all is changed. Shortly after you moved out here to the Black Hills, from the States, my father and myself emigrated to the Indian Territory, where he had been appointed agent over one of the tribes.

"During our residence there, a bold, handsome devil in man's shape, came into our midst.

"I feared him from the first, because Lucifer was in his eyes. He ingratiated himself into my father's confidence, and tried to pay me particular attentions, but I repulsed him at every turn. I could not bear him. I grew to detest the very sight of him—his every word and action was disgusting in my eyes.

"At last, I think he grew to hate me, for he took every opportunity to provoke my anger, and publicly insult me.

"Hearing of his doings—but not from my lips—my father attempted to chastise him, when the heartless villain drew a revolver and shot him through the heart!"

"Oh, mercy!" exclaimed Jessie. "And did he escape?"

"Escape? Ah! yes, but it was with me close upon his trail!" the young woman cried fiercely.

"I have pursued him with the perseverance of a bloodhound. I have sworn to kill him, and I only live to keep my oath. Jessie, you are my friend. We have been as sisters in the days that have passed. I want you, now, to shelter me, while I seek the man who destroyed my father. Oh! d-do not say no!" and the girl dropped upon her knees, and burst into a passionate fit of weeping.

"Of course you shall stay, Nelly, dear!" Jessie Mapleton replied, pityingly. "I, too, am an orphan, and alone in the world, with no one to whom to confide, or that I can trust. It is but little that I have, but you shall share it as long as there is anything to share."

"Oh! thank you! thank you, sweet sister. I will help you all within my power, and at the same time watch for the man that robbed me of all."

"What!" Jessie cried, starting back, a look of horror in her large brown eyes.

"Nelly, you——"

"Ay!" the girl cried, almost fiercely. "I bear a blasted life, and the accursed wretch is still at large."

On the following morning Ralph Lamont, the scheming stepson of Munro Malvern, called at the little shanty—the most unpretentious one in all Deadwood Gulch.

The day was a warm one, and the door being open, he entered without knocking.

Jessie was engaged in ironing some finery for a party of ladies at one of the hotels, and she did not notice the stalwart, well-dressed *roue*, until he stood quite near at hand. Then, she gave a little scream, and stepped back haughtily.

"Sir!"

"Oh! don't be in the least disconcerted, I pray!" Lamont said, with one of his most winning smiles, at the same time laying a card from his elegant case upon the table. "There is no need for alarm on your part, as perhaps you remember me as the young gentleman who chanced to rescue you from a party of attacking roughs, several nights since—do you not?"

"I certainly remember, sir!" the pretty laundry-keeper replied, without relaxing. She was quite alone, Bel Helene having gone out into the town, and she liked not the fawning, sinister appearance of the man.

"I believe I thanked you at the time?"

"Ahem! well, yes, I believe you did," the dutiful stepson of Munro Malvern was forced to acknowledge. "But when I am sent upon an errand, I generally try to execute it to the letter. For illustration: here I have a letter from an old covey, whom I met during my rambles up in Washington Territory. The old gent had been prospecting it seems, and, having struck a gold mine, he gives me a couple of nuggets, and commissions me as mail-carrier of a letter to one Miss Jessie Mapleton—which I believe is your name, from all I have been able to ascertain."

"Jessie Mapleton! my name, sir? Oh! what can this mean?" the girl gasped excitedly. "Let me have the letter, sir! What old man could wish to write to me? Oh!—oh!—if——"

"Don't be excited, my dear young lady. The letter will doubtless tell you more than I can; but I reckon the old gentleman was your father!"

"My father—*alive*! Oh! yes, God be praised, 'tis even so! Here is his writing—ay, and his signature. Oh, Mr. Lamont! how can I ever, *ever* thank you enough for this priceless gift?" the happy, overjoyed little soul cried, clasping her hands in ecstasy.

"By prizing the dear old father, who is even now blessing you in his distant miner's camp." Lamont replied, bowing profoundly. "Allow me to wish you a very pleasant good-morning."

He only retreated to the door, however, where he stood watching Jessie, as she ran to the window to read the dearly prized letter.

This is what she read:

"WASHINGTON TERRITORY,

"CAMP GOLD PIKE,

June 16th, 18—.

"BELOVED DAUGHTER:—This letter will take you by surprise, as you have probably mourned me as dead. But I am alive and well, and by an inestimable young gentleman, I at last send you a letter. When I left Deadwood (where you will remember I had a small interest in a mine), I was deeply in debt and my creditors were threatening me with imprisonment, ay, promised to lynch me if I did not square up. I could not, and so I was obliged to fly for my life. Munro Malvern (God bless him!) assisted me to escape when death stared me in the face. He had helped me to money a number of times, until he owned my share ten times over, and yet his generosity did not cease till the last, for he gave me money and promised to pay you a competence from the mine. He is noble and a good man,

without a selfish thought or a fault. I am rich now, and in a few months shall be with you, to settle with my creditors, and live in peace and happiness the rest of my days. So I sign myself,

"Your loving father,

ROBERT MAPLETON."

Jessie folded the letter, with tears of happiness in her eyes.

"Dear, *dear* papa!" she murmured; "and Mr. Malvern, too." How wrong I was to think of him so unjustly. I am sure he will never forgive me for my cruel suspicions of him."

Standing in the doorway, Ralph Lamont chuckled softly to himself.

"The thing works," he muttered: "and Unky's star is in the ascendant—likewise my purse will be attacked with a twinge of inflation. Ha! ha! That letter was a clever affair, after all."

For the remainder of that day pretty Jessie was supremely happy, and went about her work with a brightness in her eyes that had been a stranger there of late.

During the afternoon there came a knock at the door, and on answering the summons she was surprised to find Munro Malvern standing upon the threshold.

The millionaire mine-owner was attired with scrupulous neatness and elegance, and he raised his hat politely as he beheld the pretty daughter of his former partner.

"Pray excuse me, Miss Mapleton, if my coming is an intrusion, but I once more present myself to request that you accept what is duly yours—namely, a revenue derived from the small mining interest which your father owned in the Thunder Gulch lode. The mine, I am happy to say, has panned out handsomely of late, and for your small interest you have a dividend of one thousand dollars!"

"One thousand dollars! Mr. Malvern, I could not think of accepting such a sum. Please step inside, and I will give you my reasons," Jessie said, handing him a chair near the door.

The miner accepted the proffered chair, and then turned toward her whom it was his purpose to entrap as a victim.

"And now, Miss Mapleton, your objections against taking what is rightfully your own?"

"Mr. Malvern, your kindness, I have never been able to appreciate until to-day, when I received a letter from my father," Jessie replied. "In it he fully clears you of all the unjust charges I made against you, and showed what a faithful friend you had been to him. I therefore feel it my duty to ask you to forgive me for all the wrong I have believed of you."

"Forgive you, my dear lady? Why,

most assuredly. I have never cherished any but the kindest thoughts of you, for I knew you to be in error. So the old gentleman has turned up at last, eh?"

"Oh! yes, yes, and I am so glad. Mr.—Mr.—I just forget his name, brought me a letter from dear papa, who is getting rich, up in Washington Territory. But, sir, he states that at the time of his departure he owed you a great deal more than his share in the mine was worth: and therefore, I could not think of getting further into your debt by accepting money of you."

"Ha! ha! you independent little puss! You must excuse me if I admire your spirit. But those matters of other days are all cancelled, long ere this, by the yield of the mine, and you have your own dividend besides. Pray take it, without further hesitation, as it is rightfully yours." And the millionaire laid a neat package on the table.

"I—I don't know as I am doing right to take this, sir!" Jessie said, lifting the parcel and handling it carefully.

"Tut! tut! Quiet all such thoughts at once. Now, having freed my mind in this way, I have one favour to ask, and then I will be gone!"

"Name it, sir, and my gratitude will cause me to do your will!" Jessie cried, gladly.

"Well, I want you to marry me!"

"What?" The girl reeled back a pace, in sudden astonishment. "Marry you, Mr. Malvern—I marry you?"

"Exactly! Is there anything so horrifying or out of the way in that? You are pretty; I am rich. I offer you a chance to become a lady of rank and station, and you—accept?"

"No! no! Oh! that would be impossible, sir. I could never marry you—any one. I prefer to remain single."

"And I prefer to the contrary. Promise me to become Mrs. Munro Malvern within the week, and I will leave you in peace."

"Sir! I told you no! Is that not enough?"

"Curse it, *no*! You must say yes!"

"*Must*? You dare to say I *must* do a thing? Sir! There is the door—go. This interview has been prolonged too far."

"Very well; I will go!" the baffled schemer replied, as he picked up his hat and strode toward the door. "I am of the belief that you will become my wife—ha! ha! yes, I am of that belief!"

And then he took his departure, leaving poor Jessie in a state of extreme agitation, as she paced up and down the floor.

On his arrival home Munro Malvern found Hickory Hank seated in the library, enjoying the best the sideboard afforded, in the way of liquors and cigars.

"Well," he said, laying aside his hat and duster, "I see you are on hand, Grim."

"Ruther reckon so," was the sullen reply. "Cum over ter get paid fer doing sum o' your dirty work."

"Ha! ha!" Malvern laughed, surveying the rough, critically. "I should say you got all the pay any one but a hog ought to ask for. Ha! ha! ha!"

"Curse it, governor, the little cuss war an electric volcano, jest as I told ye. He basted me two sock-dolagers in the bazzoo, an' I didn't stand up ter take no more. Ther print o' his knuckles hayr, on my forefront, 'll foller me ter ther grave."

"You shouldn't have trusted yourself to fight a fisticuff duel with one who is evidently a trained boxer. Why didn't you shoot him from the word go?"

"He wouldn't hev et thet way, cuss him; and hed thet devil-cat, Baltimore Bess, to back him, an' ther heft o' ther crowd, so I layed off."

"Well, we shall have to study up some other plan to get rid of him," the schemer muttered, as he arose and paced the floor. "Hello! where's the packet of notes I left here on the fable? Did you take them, Grim?"

"Waal, I ruther reckon not," the outlaw replied, with a chuckle. "Ef I'd got hold o' 'em, most likely I shed hev slid out. Ye can search me yerself, ef ye like, an' see ef I don't adhere ter ther gospel truth."

"Never mind. Perhaps Ralph took it, the rascal. Now, about this Rosebud Rob. What appears to be his business here in Deadwood?"

"Ask me sumthin' I know an' I'll tell ye," Hickory Hank replied. "'Pears to me he don't hev no object more'n ter ply ther sport."

"Good! Let him drop for the present. I'll 'tend to his case myself. Now, there is a girl whom I want arrested on a charge of theft. You are to get your gang together, along with the sheriff, and go search her house. No doubt you will find a packet of money in her possession, which she thieved from me. Do you see? She must be arrested, and taken off to the jail, and stand her trial. I'll turn up at the right juncture, and take the case off your hands."

"Waal, I reckon ye'll hev ter pay a good sum fer seech a lay-out."

"Of course. I'll give you a hundred dollars if you do the job up in good shape. Do you understand? There must be no botch-work, as in the Rosebud Rob case."

"You bet your boots the gal will be in the 'Castle,' inside of two hours, guv'nor!" Hickory Hank replied, as he arose and left the room—"that is, if any money can be found."

CHAPTER V

THE KNIGHT OF THE BLACK PLUME

As windeth the trail of the serpent, the sinuous gulch upon which nestles the City of Deadwood points to the north and the south. Branches of it there are in a plenitude; narrow fissures and wider forks, some of which the foot of man hath never trod; deep vales or pockets, mountain-locked, through which flow streams whose waters are yellow with the "signs" for which the prospector seeketh.

In such a pocket, in between giant mountains, and communicating with Deadwood Gulch by a narrow, subterranean seam between the stupendous walls, there is a solitary ranch or cabin, set down in the flower-decked bottom, and so neatly surrounded by towering hemlocks, as to be invisible to the naked eye, from the mountain-top.

The fact that horses grazed about in the little vale was the only evidence of habitation, for no person might be seen stirring about.

But inside the large cabin, there was a scene worthy of description—a scene peculiar to the mountains and the life thereof.

The cabin was simply one large apartment without any division, or partitions.

A dozen or more network hammocks were strung up near the roof, which could be lowered for sleeping purposes; rifles, knives, belts, and the general paraphernalia of a ranger—or, rather, of a dozen of them—were strung about the walls, and in one corner a heap of saddles and blankets was deposited.

Rough deal-tables were scattered here and there, and also a variety of rude camp-stools and skin-couches. And, distributed about amidst this scene, were perhaps a dozen men, either playing cards at the tables, cleaning weapons, or playing upon some instrument, several varieties of which are here and there about the room.

All of these men are masked, and attired in the costume of the mountaineer—the inevitable knee-boots, buckskin breeches, and fringed hunting-shirts, and slouch hats.

Suddenly the inspiration seems to seize upon them, and, to the accompaniment of a violin and guitar, they break out into a wild harmony of song.

"Ha! ha! ha! well done, my boys. I am proud of so fine a corps," exclaimed a ringing voice, and the door swung ajar to admit a newcomer into the retreat—a figure clad in the same manner as those within the room, except that from the hat floated back a graceful black plume.

The upper portion of the face was covered with a black mask, through which peered a pair of eyes like dancing diamonds of coal.

"Hurrah! it's Nugget Ned, our captain!" cried the guitarist, as he laid aside his instrument and arose to his feet with a profound bow. "I allow, chief, that the Knights of the Trail are glad to welcome you back."

"I doubt not that you speak the truth, Idyl," was the pleasant reply, and the youthful chief clasped his officer's hand warmly.

"You are a faithful band, and I would be more than an idiot if I were not proud of you. I see you are all here," with a glance about the room.

"Ay! all done!" replied the lieutenant, smiling. "When *you* order, they deem it best not to disobey the Knight of the Black Plume."

"Which proves beyond a doubt their loyalty, Idyl. Now, if you will fetch me a glass of water, I will rest a bit, and then tell you of my trip, and what I learned."

"Yes! yes! tell us of the trip to Deadwood!" exclaimed the men, in a voice.

"Well, then, so be it, comrades, though of the trip proper there is nothing to tell. I arrived in Deadwood to find that our worst fears have been realized. We have been spotted in our mountain home, as *road-agents*!"

"What? Can this be true?" Idyl exclaimed; "*we* branded as road-agents?"

"Ay! 'tis even so. The business which brought us here, and leagued us into a brotherhood, has been misinterpreted, and in the eyes of these citizens of the Black Hills we are a band of outlaws, and the name of Nugget Ned, the Knight of the Gulch, is daily growing famous—is each day being handled by lying tongues, and stands a rival to the notoriety of the widely known name of Deadwood Dick!"

As he ceased speaking, the young chieftain rose to his feet, and paced to and fro across the room, his hands working convulsively.

"That is bad, captain; there seems but one path open before us."

"What is it, Idyl?"

"To dissolve the brotherhood and scatter, leaving the secret, which we have guarded so faithfully, to be found out by the world."

"Ha! ha! are you mad, sir? Give up that for which—bah!—*no*!" the knight cried sharply, breaking suddenly off from the completion of a sentence. "When the oath is broken and the band dissolved, I hope I may be dead! Only one line lies before us—as brothers we must adhere to it."

"And that is——?"

"To fight, when it comes to that—fight as devils, not as men. The secrets of the order must remain intact—the *traitor must die*!"

"The *traitor*, captain?"

"Ay! that is what I said. The traitor, be he the best in the crowd, must die!"

A low, hushed murmur from the men announced their approval, and, to a man, they rose to their feet.

"But, captain, that is a hard word, even in a whisper, to utter—that word *traitor*! Can you bring yourself to believe that there is such among our comrades?"

"Can I? I *know* it. Idyl. Has Nugget Ned ever given you a chance to question his judgment? No. Well you know that he makes *sure* of his points before he plays them. Look at this!"

And stepping to one of the tables, the chief drew a piece of paper, the shape of a man's foot, from an inner pocket, and laid it where all could gaze upon it.

Then stepping back a few paces, he drew and cocked a revolver.

A hush like death prevailed within the cabin. Not a man moved, but all stood as if rooted to the floor, gazing alternately at the paper foot shape and the masked, stern-eyed chief, whom they were bound to obey, by an oath such as men ne'er before had uttered—an oath such as a demon would have shuddered to have taken.

"You all see the print!" Nugget Ned said, as he let the hand drop by his side which held the revolver—"you all mark it sharply. Very well; that is the exact track of some person who left this ranch, crossed the pocket, and went out through the fissure into Deadwood Gulch. There, in the other prints upon the stage road, I lost the trail. Now, as none of the band ever leave here except on horseback, unless that member is sneaking away unbeknown to the rest of the band, and there is but the one foot-trail across the pocket bottom, I am positive that the man who furnished the news to the Deadwood authorities is a member of my band—one of you who are gazing at me as I speak. Boys, I hate to suspect any of you, but the oath we all took must be adhered to and the traitor punished."

"Therefore, I brought this paper, which is an exact measure of the foot. Let every man step upon it, squarely, and we will see who is the traitor!"

Without a word the lieutenant proceeded to set the example.

He spread the paper out upon the rude earthen floor and stepped upon it with precision.

A murmur ran among the Knights.

"You are not the man!" Nugget Ned said, bending over and scrutinizing the impression. "Idyl, you may step aside. Number One, you next."

A short, stout fellow complied promptly,

quite covering the slip of paper with his stogy boot.

"Not the one!" Nugget Ned announced, quietly, although there was a stern glitter in his eye. "Next!"

Number Two, Three, Four and Five in succession stepped upon the fateful strip of paper, but covered it "by a large majority."

Number Six, a tall, strong-limbed fellow, straight as an arrow and compactly built, next stepped forward to measure.

He had only a medium-sized foot, and the attention of all was called to him.

He was seen to tremble visibly, as he caught the stern eye of the chief.

"Step upon it!" Nugget Ned said, sharply. "Idyl, look to the measure. I think we have our man!"

Number Six trembled violently, as he placed the right foot upon the paper that was to tell the tale.

"It is exactly the size of the measure, captain!" Lieutenant Idyl replied, a moment later. "A shoemaker could not have cut a better pattern of the bottom of Number Six's boot!"

"As I thought," Nugget Ned replied. "Wesley Dandleton is the traitor. But I wouldn't hang a dog even on that proof. Some one bring a piece of sodded earth larger than a man's foot. Number Six will step upon it, and if his foot leaves an impression of a star in the heel, he is the man we want beyond dispute."

One of the Knights turned to leave the cabin, but a cry from Number Six caused him to pause.

"Stop! you need not go to that trouble," the accused said, hoarsely. "I will acknowledge that the star is upon my heel, and *that I am the traitor!* God in heaven help me!"

And the wretch fell upon his knees, and began to groan and snivel.

"Stand erect!" cried Nugget Ned, sharply. "Keep back, boys," as the Knights pressed forward with levelled revolvers. "I'll attend to this case, if you please. Wesley Dandleton, stand erect, I say!"

With a groan the traitor obeyed, but hung his head and trembled violently; more than he would, perhaps, had he not feared instant death.

"Look at me!" Nugget Ned next commanded, and in a tone which caused the guilty wretch to comply—for he knew refusal or hesitation meant instant death. He gave a single affrighted glance and then dropped his gaze to the floor.

"Wesley Dandleton!" the Knight of Knights said, as he cleared his throat, "you have acknowledged yourself a traitor among

us. You are well aware of the penalty which we all swore by an awful oath to mete out to that member who should deal by us treacherously. I need not say that it is *death*. You have done more than betray the secrets of our brotherhood—you have branded us to the authorities as road-agents, and we are henceforth as outlaws, though we have done no deed of outlawry. Will you make a clean breast of the matter? Tell us the why you betrayed us, and how far?"

"No! what would it avail me?" the poor wretch demanded, hoarsely. "It would be death all the same."

"Ay! it could make no difference in that respect."

"Then, I will carry my secrets with me to the death. Go ahead and kill me. I am as brave now to meet my doom as I can ever be!"

"You need not look upon me as your executioner!" Nugget Ned said, calmly. "I will leave your fate in the hands of those who have been your brothers during our league as a band. Yonder is a box, upon the table. Let each man write on a slip of paper 'Yes,' or 'No,' and cast it into the box. I will then count them. If there be more nays than yeas, you are free to go whither you will. If to the contrary, you shall hang to the noose, which does its work for many a traitor!"

At a motion, each of the eleven knights wrote upon slips of paper, and cast them into the box as directed.

In mute supplication Dandleton dropped upon his knees, and raised his eyes towards heaven.

Nugget Ned next went to the box, and with a coolness born of experience in critical moments, counted the strips.

At last he turned upon his heel, and with a newborn hope the guilty man half sprang toward him. But he shrank back when he saw the shake of the knight's head.

"It is not what I had hoped for!" he said grimly. "There is not one *nay* in the box, and your doom is sealed!"

"Oh! merciful Heaven!" the traitor murmured, dropping flat upon his face with a pitiful wail.

Nugget Ned turned aside, perhaps to hide any agitation he may have experienced, although the mask was over his face.

Several paces about the room; then he paused and glanced about, into the faces of those who had served faithfully under his flag.

"Comrades! I leave you to execute the work you have unanimously consented to do—namely, the lynching of Wesley Dandleton. As for myself, I leave this valley for good. You can follow me into the neighbourhood of Deadwood, and hold

yourselves ready to answer the call of my silver shriek. Remember! the order of our union is not yet broken, and though you know not and never have known who is your leader, under the disguise of Nugget Ned, I believe you have enough confidence in me to follow where I lead."

"Ay, ay! captain! I can answer as to that for the boys!" Lieutenant Idyl cried, enthusiastically.

"Good! I am glad to know it. But now, *adios!* I go to Deadwood on business which brought me into these Hills. Be you in waiting close by, but not in a body, with disguises in your saddle-bags, for you may be wanted at any instant. When they hang Nugget Ned for a road-agent, it will be because he cannot pull a trigger in self-defence."

And turning upon his heel, the chief of the mysterious Knights left the cabin, without a backward glance.

Lieutenant Idyl then motioned to one of the number, and from up among the rafters the noosed end of a strong cord was brought down, until about nine feet from the floor, where it hung, swaying to and fro.

Not a word was now spoken.

The men went at their work as if they thoroughly understood what devolved upon them to do.

While several bound the doomed man, hand and foot, others placed a table beneath the noose, and a stool beside it.

Dandleton was then led forward, and lifted upon the table to a standing position, so that the horrible noose dangled before his face, as if to mock his fears.

"Mercy!" he gasped, appealingly.

"No! mercy is something I know not in the execution of my duty!" Idyl replied, sternly.

He then stepped upon the table beside the prisoner and adjusted the fatal noose about Dandleton's neck.

Then, he stepped from the table to the floor; there were several minutes of silence, after which the table was suddenly jerked from beneath the doomed man's feet, and he swung by his neck in mid-air.

Idyl then turned to his companions with a shudder.

"The job is done. Placard the body, and then each man away to the outskirts of Deadwood. Let not a moment be lost. Number Seven, blow the call for the horses; the rest of you gather up the traps."

The order was obeyed.

In fifteen minutes the cabin in the hemlocks was dismantled of everything portable, and the Knights were ready for a start.

At a word from Idyl they mounted and dashed away across the valley, and soon were lost to view in a crevice of the mighty

piles of craggy rock which rolled up into the picturesque grandeur towards a sunset sky.

Scarcely were they out of sight, when a man rose from among the natural flower-beds of the pocket, and glided to the cabin door.

It needs but a glance to recognize him as one we have met before, and that one none other than the mine-owner, Munro Malvern.

He pushed open the door, and peered into the cabin with a shiver.

Then he leaped back with a yell.

A frightful spectacle met his gaze—a distorted corpse dangling to a rope in mid-air, near the centre of the apartment.

And upon the breast of the lynched traitor was fastened a placard, upon which was written in crimson, the words:

"A traitor—A warning to those who would imitate his example!"

"Ten thousand furies!" Munro Malvern gasped, turning away. "Again am I foiled by that devil in mask, who styles himself Nugget Ned!"

CHAPTER VI

COMING TO AN UNDERSTANDING

WE return to Deadwood.

It is now several days since the occurrence of the incidents, last narrated, in the mountain pocket.

Munro Malvern sat again in his library, and there was a dark expression upon his countenance.

"Curses on this worry which is now constantly upon my mind!" he cried out, fiercely, glaring at the figures in the matting upon the floor. "A month more of it will put me in my grave. Curse the dandy, Rosebud Rob—curse everybody and everything; I hate all! Ha! ha! they are working to hedge me in, these enemies of mine, and crush me out of existence. But, they shall find me steel to the last! I will fight them with weapons made of gold. Ha! ha! the Big Bullion mine is yet mine own. They cannot get it away from me—unless Robert Mapleton should come to light!"

"Robert Mapleton has already come to light!" cried a triumphant voice, and the guilty mine-owner wheeled around with a startled oath, to behold—Rosebud Rob, the Sport, standing just within the room, attired as usual with the greatest precision.

"Ha! you!" the millionaire gasped, a glare of hatred coming into his eyes.

"Rather calculate that it isn't no one else!" was the cool reply. "One would have guessed that you were expecting to see a ghost by the way you looked around!"

"I was not expecting you, curse your impudence! How did you gain admission, sir?"

"Oh! that was easy enough. I allowed

a small-sized six-shooter, which I generally carry, to grin at your Ethiopian servitor, down in the hall, and he made himself invisible in the wink of a cat's eye."

Munro Malvern arose from his seat, a hard expression coming over his features.

"See here!" he said, bending toward the Sport, a devilish glitter in his eye—"we may as well understand each other at once. You have come here to Deadwood for a purpose. You need not deny it, for I know to the contrary. What is that purpose, curse you—*what is it?*"

"You shall know!" Rosebud Rob said a sudden grimness coming over him—"you shall know, Munro Malvern. I have come here to investigate a few matters relating to the decease of my father, Robert Mapleton, and to his estate. You must know that I would naturally have an interest in the case. I have not been idle—oh! no. I have been digging deep after the truth—searching for the truth that would have you upon a murderer's gallows.

"Ha! ha! you start, you black-hearted villain—you start! you tremble! What better acknowledgment can there be of your guilt? Tell me, Munro Malvern—where is my father, the owner of the Big Bullion mine, whose place you are usurping?"

And the tones of the speaker were fierce and threatening.

The mine-monopolist staggered back, like a wolf at bay.

"Blast you!" he gasped, his face distorted by a terrible rage. "What do you mean? Would you brand *me* with murder, you viper? Get clear of my house, before I am tempted to murder *you*!"

"Ha! ha!" Rosebud Rob laughed, coolly. "No doubt you are sorely tempted to do that very thing, now, but you realize it is out of your power. Sit down, Munro Malvern and let me relate a little story. It is not of great length but serves to introduce to you the man you see before you—'A Man to Suit All Circumstances.' Will you listen?"

"Go on," the mine-owner growled savagely. "I will hear you, standing. When you are through—go!"

"Exactly! When I am *through*, I will go, I assure you. Now about the story. To begin with:

"Once upon a time, as all fairy tales open, there came into the precincts of the mining strike in Cinnamon gulch, a queer old customer of the tramp species, who had in his possession a youth whom the tramp fondly called 'sonny.' This youth was a lad who had buffeted the world alone for some years, until he had joined in with the tramp.

"End of Chapter First!"

"In Chapter Second we find the youth developing, under the old man's instructions, into a first-class actor, albeit this same youth had previously been upon the stage, in minor parts. The old man furnishes him with money in plenty, and tutors him into a man ready to suit all circumstances—a dare-devil—a prize-fighter, a young bully—yet, a gentleman!"

"Chapter Third. This youth 'pans out in purty much good style,' in the vernacular of Cinnamon gulch, and men soon understand that, although a dandy, a sport, a man to suit all circumstances, this individual is a man who fears naught, and that once upon the scent of a foe, bloodhound-like he follows—ferret-like he pursues with a vengeance, until the game pauses, baffled, cornered, foiled at every turn, with an eternity at either hand—a yawning gulf over which there is no escape!"

"Chapter Fourth. The old tramp dies, and discloses an important secret, and wills his money to this pard of his, with the provision that the young individual, who, from a fondness of wearing buttonhole bouquets had earned the *sobriquet* of Rosebud Rob, would agree to certain things which he might name.

"Of course this Rosebud Rob did agree, whereupon ends the sanguine romance. Do you see the point, Munro Malvern?"

"I see no point in your nonsensical attempt at story-telling, sir."

"Then, know you, that I have struck the scent, and shall hunt you down to the end of the trail of guilt which you are following. I shall not have the least mercy on you, because you are not of those merciful. You murdered my father, Robert Mapleton, Senior. I cannot prove it, and accordingly shall not noise it abroad at present. But, I shall guard you as I would a nugget of gold—ha! ha! yes, and when it comes handiest I shall accept the Big Bullion mine from your hands, while your neck is put inside Judge Lynch's accommodating noose. Mr. Munro Malvern, I bid you a pleasant good-evening—a very, very pleasant good-evening."

And, turning suddenly, the Sport was gone, leaving his foe glaring after him in a silent paroxysm of rage.

The city of Deadwood boasts of gambling places in great number—perhaps, of more than any place of its size in the world.

The "Fucher Deck" was a favourite resort of Mr. Ralph Lamont, who, it will be remembered, was proud in calling himself the dutiful stepson of the man of millions, Munro Malvern.

Every night, and often the whole of the days, found the spendthrift within the

gambling establishment, either watching the games or taking a hand. When he was so fortunate as to have extorted a sum of money from his stepfather, he played until he had lost every farthing; then he was a spectator, until he could obtain another gift, or could induce somebody to lend him a sum.

To-night, again, he was penniless, having lost the last dollar of the money he had taken from Malvern's library, in consideration for services rendered, as hitherto mentioned. Not a penny had he left, and the game of chance seemed more alluring than ever, now that he had no ready cash to invest.

"Not a red cent!" he mused, as he dived for the twentieth time into his pockets, to find them empty. "Dash it—the same old, old story—*bu'sted*. I wonder if the governor hasn't got some more forgery for me to execute—some love-letters for me to indite? Not a show for me here, to-night, without wealth—not a single smell, by Jove! They all know me. That's the deuce of being notoriously popular in the fine art of borrowing and never paying your dues. Hello! who is this? Perhaps a new one, who does not know me. Jove! and she is as beautiful as a grizzly cub six months after birth!"

He gazed, as he uttered these latter words, at a female who had just entered the "Eucher Deck," and was sauntering toward him—a young woman, evidently not yet out of her teens, and, as he had remarked, very pretty, in a Spanish Mexican costume, with short skirt, and fancifully-beaded leggings.

Approaching Lamont, the Pistol Queen, for it was she, smiled sweetly, although there was a burning fire in her eyes which the spendthrift failed to notice.

"Do you play cards, señor?" Bel Helene asked, with a glance toward a table which was just being vacated.

"Why!—well—that is—yes!" Lamont stammered, as the horrifying thought of his empty pockets rushed upon him—and here was a chance to spend an hour with one of the prettiest women that had ever graced the "Eucher Deck." "But, you—you perceive, my dear lady, I am dead broke!"

"Ha! ha! dead broke, eh? Well, that will make no difference, as long as I am blessed with a plenty. Besides, you may be able to serve me in a way that will repay. Come! before the table is taken, for there are others standing ready."

Highly pleased, the dutiful stepson of Munro Malvern followed his strange acquaintance, and soon they were seated at the table, with a bottle of high wine between them, engaged in the popular game of the mines—poker.

"Drink and be merry, Mr. Lamont!" the Pistol Queen said, merrily. "We will have another game—then I want you to oblige me with a little information."

"Ask me anything in this wide world, my dear creature, and I will answer with the greatest pleasure!" Lamont assured, graciously, for his spirits were becoming more buoyant the faster he imbibed the bottled spirits.

The game was soon played through, and by that time the spendthrift was just boozy enough to be communicative. Bel Helene had been watching him narrowly all the while, and an expression of triumph shot into her eyes now, as she saw that *her* time for playing had arrived.

"Listen to me!" she said, bending forward toward him, and enchainning his gaze—"listen to me; I am in search of a man; I believe him to be here in Deadwood. Perhaps you can tell me of him. Did you, sir, ever hear of a man whose name was Sanderson—Garyl Sanderson?"

"Phew!" Lamont gasped, leaning back with a drunken chuckle. "I guess you've pretty near struck ile the first time, my beauty. *Garyl Sanderson*? Why, that's the very name my old Unky used to travel under, sure's I'm a champagne bottle!"

"*Your Unky*!" Bel Helene half whispered, leaning further toward him, her features working with emotion, and her hands clinching until the nails cut into the flesh. "You must tell me of him! Who is this man you call 'Unky'?"

"My dear creature, he is my beloved stepfather, from whom I occasionally make a *spec*, when I am hard-up for cash."

"And his name—his name?"

"Phew! Must be a stranger here, eh? especially if you don't know the cognominious appellation of my representative—aw—my business-manager, you see—Munro Malvern, ma'am."

"And this is the man who once travelled through the West under the name of Garyl Sanderson?" the Pistol Queen asked, nervously.

"The very same old nabob!" Lamont assured, emptying the bottle to the last drop. "Ye see, he's got up in the world some, since then, and assumed his genuine name!"

"Then, Malvern is his name, eh?—his real name by birthright?"

"So far as I know, it is!"

"And this is the man, then, whom I seek—the wretch whose life I have hunted so long!" the girl muttered, under her breath. "Oh! father. I am close upon his trail, and you shall be avenged!"

Then, aloud, she addressed Lamont once more:

"I must get into Munro Malvern's house—

I must, I say; nothing but death can stop me. You are familiar with the place—you must tell me how I can get in!”

“My beloved creature—anything to accommodate you. Bring me another bottle of the glorious spirit with which you have enthused me, and I will surrender unto you my night-key, which will admit you into the palatial mansion of my governor!”

Bel Helene did not wait for deliberation—she knew the bargain was to insure the success of her plans.

She ordered and paid for the wine; then receiving the keys from Lamont, and leaving him to make a night of it, she hurried out into the gulch.

“Now, Munro Malvern—now, Garyl Sanderson, the hour of my vengeance has arrived!”

CHAPTER VII

A WARNING

“GREAT spirit uv old Methus’ler! they do say that we aire goin’ ter hev an actooal resurrection o’ ther days o’ thet cuss, Deadwood Dick, wi’ thes galoot, Nugget Ned, whom ther paper’s blowin’ so much about, fer ther chief centre pole ter ther pavilion o’ vice an’ road-agentry. Neow, in the legal opinyun uv ther court, of whom I, Colonel William Henry Harrison Stokes, ar’ an ann’inted an’ reverend representative—a beautiful model of the great colossal statue o’ justice—the business orter be nipped in ther bud. In the revised statuary o’ ther latest improved laws o’ ther city o’ Deadwood, it ar’ laid down thet road-agentry consists o’ a band o’ masked galoots, business unknown, who cavort thru’ ther labyrinthian recesses, an’ crooks an’ crannies uv a mountain deestrect, fer ther purpuss o’ pillage an’ plunder, an’ ter intimidate widders an’ children, an’ scare old maids out o’ ther growth which nature demands, wi’ ther advance o’ years. Them’s ther laws; an’ thet ther offence ar’ punishable six feet above *terra-firma*, wi’ a stout limb an’ a hemp cravat fer ther acting judge. Now then, I say, swing up this new road-agent, as an example ter ther world.”

“Who knows fer sart’in, colonel, thet Nugget Ned and his knights *are* road-agents?” ventured Baltimore Bess—for the scene was in the “Little Brown Jug,” with the usual characters that frequented the place. “Et hain’t been proved thet they hev committed any depredations of a lawless turn.”

“Ah! Bess, gal, ye don’t understand ther intricacies o’ ther great rejuvenated laws o’ ther United States o’ Ameriky. But, here comes a stranger—pew!”

All eyes were involuntarily turned upon

a man who had just entered through the open door—a straight, wiry figure, of medium height, clad in the costume of a mountain ranger, while over the upper part of his face he wore a black mask.

He stood for a moment and glanced about the room, as if in search of some one; then, turning suddenly, he left the saloon without a word.

“‘Sh!” Baltimore Bess said, “there is the man you would condemn, colonel; that was Nugget Ned!”

“Ethereal spirit of old Methus’ler!” he gasped, in great surprise. “War *that* the galoot who knows so much and yet says so little? Is that the road rider, whom it is ther intention o’ ther committee on elevation ter hang, at first opportunity?”

“The same chap!” affirmed Bess.

“Ther i-identical galoot!” chimed in Kentucky Jack, from his perch behind the bar.

“‘Sh!” Bess said again. “Don’t you hear the tramp of horses’ feet, outside? Something is going ter happen. Keep still! I’ll plug ther first galoot as motions for a weepoon—that’s me, Baltimore Bess. Ah! here comes the Knight, again.”

True! Nugget Ned again stepped inside the saloon, and glanced around, once more. Seeing no weapons drawn, he advanced, with a sheet of paper of large size, and with the butt of a revolver, tacked it to the wall.

Then, with a low bow, to each of the puzzled spectators, he slowly retreated to the door, and bowed himself out into the darkness of the night.

A moment later, hoof-strokes were heard rapidly receding.

“Pew!” Baltimore Bess said, after the strange visitor had gone. “He war jest as cool as a frozen cucumber, you bet! An’, lookee thar, pilgrims, at w’at he has tacked to the wall—a notice!”

“Read it, Bess, gal!” grunted the colonel, with a sigh.

“Listen, then!” the girl said, as she gazed at the writing upon the poster.

“Here is w’at the galoot sez:

“‘DEADWOOD, July —, 187—.

“‘To all whom it may concern:

“‘Whereas, the authorities of Deadwood and the surrounding districts have branded Nugget Ned and his Knights as road-agents, they had best look out that innocent men are not drawn into a life of outlawry, which would terminate disastrously for those who would be the oppressors. The Knights aim to harm none but those who shall harm them, but they should not be crowded upon! “‘NUGGET NED.’”

Bel Helene, after leaving the saloon where she had so successfully inveigled

Ralph Lamont into her plans, hurried through the street, until she came to a place where the buildings were few and scattering.

Further on, the mansion of Munro Malvern stood, almost isolated from neighbours, and looking imposing compared with the rude shanties which made up the popular mining town or city.

She approached the house like one upon some dark mission, glancing sharply about as if expecting a surprise from some hidden foe.

Softly she crept up the steps and fitted the latch-key into the latch. Then she listened!

All was silent within. It was near the midnight hour; probably the inmates were asleep.

She waited a moment, then unlocked the door and—*came face to face with Munro Malvern!*

She started back with a little scream, and her hand flew into the folds of her dress.

But the mine-owner was too quick for her. With a savage oath he cocked a pistol which he held in his hand, and fired full into her breast.

She threw up her arms with a gasp, and would have fallen, but he sprang forward—caught her—dragged her out into the street.

"My God! another murder upon your soul, Munro Malvern!" the guilty man gasped, in a horrified whisper, as he saw the blood spurt from the wound, when he dropped the body upon the ground. "And her, too? Bah! Why shudder? Hark! I hear a footstep—I must get back into the house and——"

Without completing his sentence the murderer dropped the weapon with which he had committed the crime, and slunk back into the mansion, closing the door softly after him.

A few seconds later a man came striding along, whistling merrily, and he nearly stumbled over the body, which was lying in the centre of the road.

"Hello! the Dickens! here's somebody down—either dead or dead drunk. A woman, too! Ha! here is *blood*! She is dead. Who could have done this job?"

And Rosebud Rob, the Sport—for it was he—shuddered, as he gazed at the ghastly spectacle lying in the silvery flood of moonlight.

"Ha! by Heaven! it is the same young woman that I saw at the Jardin Mabille, whom they called Bel Helene! This is a bit of foul play—and directly in front of the mansion of Munro Malvern! Could he have done it? No! his house is dark. Ah! here is a revolver which the assassin has left behind him!"

Espying the weapon the Sport picked it up out of the dust, and wiping it off, proceeded to examine it in the moonlight which flooded over into the gulch from the mountain-tops, where tall naked pines stood like ghostly witnesses to the crime which had just been committed. Failing to find anything peculiar about the weapon, except that it was handsomely finished, Rosebud Rob once more bent over the murdered girl.

"She is quite dead!" he muttered, awed by the ghastly sight—"dead, never more to return to life!"

"And, Sir Murderer, you are *my prisoner!*" cried a voice close at hand, and several hands were laid heavily upon the Sport.

"*What!*" he gasped, wheeling out of their grasp with a lightning movement. "You accuse *me* of this dastardly crime? Stand back! The man who moves an inch will cause me to do murder in earnest!"

And the Sport's hands held a pair of cocked revolvers, which he had drawn and levelled at his accusers, who comprised the sheriff, George Shelby, and a half-dozen others, who had been attracted to the spot by the pistol report.

So rapid had been the Sport's move that he was upon the defensive seemingly in an instant.

"Do you deny that you killed this woman?" Shelby demanded, incredulously—for he was a man who believed in giving every dog a chance, before punishing him. "Do you deny that you fired the shot? Why, we found you with the revolver in your hand!"

"Exactly. I came along a few seconds after the work had been done, and nearly stumbled over the body. Noticing the revolver lying in the road, I naturally picked it up, just before you came upon me to accuse me of the crime," Rosebud Rob replied, calmly.

"That story, though plausible, will hardly prove satisfactory, sir, and we are in duty bound to arrest you!" Shelby replied, sternly.

"You do so at the peril of your lives then!" Rosebud Rob cried, keeping his revolvers levelled upon them. "I did not do the deed; I'll fight before I'll suffer arrest!"

"Ha! what means this parleying over the arrest of a murderer, Sheriff Shelby?" cried an authoritative voice, and Munro Malvern, attired only in his pantaloons and shirt, stepped out of his mansion into the street. "He is a murderer, and shall be hung for his crime. Arrest him, I say, at once!"

"But he denies the crime, sir!" the

sheriff replied, scarcely knowing what to do, with the pair of revolvers in Rosebud Rob's hands levelled at him.

"Denies it?" cried the mine-owner, with a cool, cynical laugh. "Why, I was looking out of the window, and saw him shoot the woman!"

"That settles it!" Shelby decided, sternly. "Sir, will you surrender, or must we take you?"

"I will surrender!" Rosebud Rob said, grimly. "This man, Munro Malvern, is the bitterest enemy I have in the wide world, and he has taken this opportunity to strike me this blow. I thank you, Munro Malvern, for manifesting such an interest in my welfare. You laugh now, but he laughs best who laughs last. That will be I. Though you have put a crime upon my shoulders, which no doubt was committed by yourself, you will find me game to the last. Ha! ha! Do you remember that little story I related to you about the good Samaritan of my younger days? Well, go you into your home, and ponder over it, and turn over in your mind the name of Carrolton—Leslie and Lotta Carrolton. Ha, ha, ha! Mr. Sheriff, I am yours truly!"

And throwing down his revolvers, the Sport allowed the officer to handcuff and hurry him away to the jail.

While Munro Malvern turned and re-entered the mansion, like one just recovering from a blow.

At the time of his entering the mansion, a crowd had been gathering about the body of the Pistol Queen, out of curiosity, and the report that the Dandy Rosebud Rob, had shot her, created no little sensation.

"I don't believe a word of it!" Baltimore Bess said, as she pushed forward, and gazed at the dead girl, "an' hyar's what don't keer who knows it. That Sport warn't one o' ther kind to war ag'in' wimmin, an' don't ye fergit it!"

"Pick up ther poor gal an' fetch her to my cabin!" a miner said. "She can't lay here in the street."

Accordingly the lifeless body was raised and borne down the gulch, followed by the curious crowd.

One man lingered behind the rest, long enough to pick up the hitherto unnoticed revolvers of Rosebud Rob, and the one that had been the executioner of Bel Helene.

"These may be of use!" he muttered, then he joined the crowd and was lost to view.

CHAPTER VIII

ARRESTED

HICKORY HANK, the border ruffian, did not always attend to his business punctually,

but generally had a drunk of it while his money lasted, when he would "lay for" some other job to replenish his wallet.

Therefore, he did not attend to the case given into his charge by Munro Malvern, until the morning after the midnight arrest of Rosebud Rob.

Pretty Jessie Mapleton, the proprietress of the Acme Laundry—of which she was also the acting worker—was just finishing an early ironing, when she heard a hum of voices outside her shanty, and the next minute Sheriff Shelby, followed by Hickory Hank and his gang, burst into the little kitchen.

"Hooray!" Grim ejaculated, as his greedy, wolfish eyes rested upon the startled maiden; "thar's the gal, sheriff—ther very indentercal gal we want. Ha! ha! ha!"

Trained to do his bidding, the ruffian's pals also laughed.

"Hold on!" Shelby said, pushing Grim back. "You let me manage this matter, please. I am the sheriff, not you. The young lady cannot be arrested until we prove that she has the money in her possession."

"The money!" gasped Jessie, stepping back, her face paling. "What do you mean, sir?"

"We mean, my purty, thet we've cum fer the money you stole from Mister Malvern, a few days ago!" Hickory Hank leered, triumphantly.

"My God! what vile conspiracy is this!" the astounded girl gasped, sinking upon a chair, her face now colourless. "Is this the way my foe has taken to strike me?"

"You will excuse me, ma'am," Shelby said, hurling Grim back again; "but it is a very unpleasant duty which brings me here. A warrant has been issued by Mr. Munro Malvern, and placed in my hands by Hickory Hank, charging you with theft, and necessitating your arrest if the money can be found."

"Oh! sir, this is a vile plot to ruin me!" Jessie cried, bursting into tears. "I did not steal Mr. Malvern's money; he gave it to me as my—as my share. Go on, Mr. Shelby, and do your duty. I have said all that is necessary."

"Yas, go on, sheriff," Grim urged, with a diabolical leer. "S'arch every nook an' cranny, an' ef ye don't find a thousand dollar's worth o' greenbacks my name ain't an honour ter the town o' Deadwood—that's all."

Shelby obeyed. It was his duty to believe no one, as an officer, without proof, yet he could not bring himself to believe that this fair, pure girl could be what she was accused of being—a thief.

He went carefully over the room, and

examined everything that could contain the alleged stolen money; but he failed to find it.

Jessie, unable to utter a word, so overwhelming was her horror, sat half-crouching upon the chair, and watched him with wildly-staring eyes.

"Better s'arch the gal," Hickory Hank suggested, with a grin. "Ten ter one she's got the rhino stored away among her clothin'!"

"No need o' thet," interposed one of the gang named Holy Moses, rising from a search under the carpet. "Heer's ther money, now."

A scream—a fall from the chair—Jessie had fainted!

"You deserve arrest more than she does, Grim!" Sheriff Shelby said, angrily. "Give me the money; then go send me a carriage. You have no further action in this case at present."

Hickory Hank bowed, and, after Holy Moses had delivered up the package of money, the roughs all took their departure, Grim promising to send a vehicle.

After they were gone George Shelby set to work, and, in the course of a few moments, had Jessie restored to consciousness.

"Don't be alarmed, Miss Mapleton," he said, as Jessie opened her eyes with a convulsive shudder.

"Grim and his men have gone, and there is no one to annoy you, unless it is me, and I trust I may arrange so as not to annoy you."

"But—oh! sir, they found the money!"

"Yes, it was found. Which was bad, under the circumstances, as your prosecutor, Mr. Malvern, is a rich, and, in one sense, an influential man. But, though I am an officer of the law, I believe there is some little villainy here, and I promise you that I shall not desert you. I have been sheriff in Deadwood long enough to learn some points, and you shall have the advantage of them. Will you be kind enough to tell me how you came in possession of this money, which Munro Malvern claims was stolen from him, by you?"

"Oh! yes, sir, and if you only believe me, I shall not feel utterly friendless!" Jessie cried, eagerly; and then she related all that is known to the reader concerning the letter brought to her by Ralph Lamont; the visit of Munro Malvern, and also some items of her previous life back to the date when her father had mysteriously disappeared.

Shelby listened intently, and occasionally jotted down something in his note-book. He seemed deeply interested.

"I have heard you," he said, when she had completed her narrative, "and you can

rest assured I shall take a lively interest in looking into this case. There are some strongly romantic points in this case, and also some chances for a villain to put in his schemes!"

"And must you arrest me?"

"Yes, that is my duty, as the money was found in your possession. But, all that is necessary for you to do, is to come with me to the office of the attorney-judge, who has charge of such cases, and I will procure your bail, so that you are free until you are summoned to appear on trial."

"Oh! sir, you will do this, and save me the disgrace of imprisonment?"

"Certainly, dear lady, and as much more for you as I can."

"Oh! thank you! thank you! Your kindness I shall never forget!"

"Never mind that, ma'am. As my time is not my own, if you will oblige me by coming with me——"

"Oh! yes. I will get my hat, and be ready in a moment. With such a protector as you, sir, I shall not fear to face my enemy!"

And rising, she hastened to attire herself for the street.

They then left the cabin, entered the carriage, and proceeded up the thronged main street.

The seat of justice in Deadwood was a large room of a building near the centre of the town, the upper storey of which building was used as offices of so styled lawyers who had flocked into the mines.

But as it happened, the firm of Stokes & Schriener was the most popular, inasmuch as the latter had been elected judge of such courts as were inaugurated in the mining city.

A crowd of curious individuals were hanging about the doors, as Shelby and Jessie entered the court-room. Inside, as the poor girl had anticipated, were gathered Hickory Hank, his pals, and Munro Malvern.

Judge Jacob occupied a seat behind a high pulpit-like contrivance, over which just his head could be seen.

Colonel Bill Stokes sat close at hand, his bald pate shining like a full moon. Adolphus Cole, recording clerk, occupied another conspicuous position. Several other legal aspirants were gathered around.

"Hello! vat haff you got dere, sheriff?" the judge demanded, bouncing to his feet, on Shelby's entrance.

"A young lady, your Honour!" Shelby responded, leading Jessie forward.

"Von young lady, clerk; register her!" commanded the judge.

"Sheriff, vat ish der charges mit dis young vimmens?"

"She is charged with theft, your Honour!"

"Clerk, write 'im down. Sheriff, vat did der young voomans steal?"

"She is charged with stealing a package of money amounting to one thousand dollars."

"Clerk, write 'im down. Sheriff, who from did dish girl sdole der money?"

"From *me*!" said Munro Malvern, stepping forward.

"*You lie!*" Jessie cried, indignantly—"you lie, you scheming villain!"

"Clerk, put dot down. Sheriff, der trial is postponed until der-morrow at swi' o'clock. In der mean dime, der young vimmens ish committed mit der shail in default of——"

"Hold! the young lady shall not go to jail, for I will go her bail in any sum the court may see fit to name!" cried Sheriff Shelby, stepping forward.

"Curse you, man! what do you mean?" the mine-owner hissed in a rage. "The girl shall go to——"

"Der court accepts von t'ousand dollars pail," yelled Schriener from his judicial pulpit. "Der girl ish free; der court ish dismissed ten minutes fer refreshments!"

Shelby turned upon the mine-owner fiercely.

"You will find that Miss Mapleton has a friend in me, Mr. Munro Malvern!" he said. "Though you are a man of millions, I do not fear you. Oh, no!"

"Mr. Sheriff, youst arrest that man for contempt mit der court, by swearin'. I fine him five tollars."

"Keep off!" Malvern gritted, as the sheriff moved toward him. "Here," and he threw a half-eagle upon the floor. "I could buy off a hundred such courts!" and with an ugly laugh he wheeled and left the court-room.

"Shimminy Shackson! vot a vool I vas not ter say ten dollars!" grunted the judge, as he descended to the floor to secure the gold piece.

"Shentlemen, all, I pid you adieu. I have to go see a man up der street."

Shelby turned to Jessie with a smile.

"Your prosecutor evidently left us in a savage mood, Miss Mapleton. Shall I see you home?"

"As you please, Mr. Shelby; I am not afraid to go alone."

"Then, I must beg to excuse myself on the plea of business. I will secure you good counsel, and call for you at two to-morrow."

Jessie bowed, and then left the place to seek her own shanty home.

After she had gone, Shelby turned to Colonel Bill Stokes, who had all this while been a silent spectator.

"Well, colonel, you have heard the case.

Money was found in the young lady's place of residence, which Munro Malvern is ready to swear was stolen from him; and also proposes to put up Hickory Hank and gang as witnesses. What do you think about it?"

"I think it's a gum-game—sure's my name is Bill Stokes!" the colonel replied, slapping his knee, enthusiastically. "The gal's no more a thief than you or I. I uster know old Bobby Mapleton, an' he warn't ther daddy o' no light-fingers, you bet!"

"Will you defend the girl's case, colonel? I'll foot the bill, and if you free her I'll make it well worth your while."

"Then, ye ken count on me, sheriff—great speerit uv 'old Methus'ler, yes. Ef thar's enuff p'int in ther hull legal judas-prudence, thet ar' gal shell be cleared, I sw'ar ter et."

Shelby bowed and left the seat of justice in deep thought.

"I take an interest in this young woman's welfare; I shall work for her. My first move will be to visit this man Hartley, of Duck-Tail gulch," he said.

The Deadwood jail, known as the "castle," was built of stone, and was as creditable an affair in appearance, as any within the magic city.

There were several cells on each side of a corridor, on the upper floor, the ground apartments being devoted to the uses of a grocery store.

The entrance to the cells was by a stone staircase, and up these steps Rosebud Rob had been led to his confinement.

The number of his cell was "4" and here he had been confined ever since his arrest, only being visited twice a day by an ignorant-looking janitor, who fetched his food.

But this individual could not be induced to talk, and all that was left for the incarcerated Sport was to talk to himself, at times.

It was now the night following the scene in the court-room, and the prisoner sat upon a poorly constructed stool, gazing moodily at his surroundings.

"I wonder how long I am to remain in this confounded hole yet?" he muttered, as he bowed his head upon his hands. Ha! a noise in the hall, outside! What does it mean?"

"Hist!" exclaimed a low voice. "Do not raise a racket, but keep mum. I am here for your interest."

Then there was a fumbling of metal against iron, as if a key were being tried to a lock.

Rosebud Rob listened a moment, then arose cautiously to his cell, and crept toward the door of his cell, his black eyes

piercing the gloom. But, all he was able to discover was a man working at the lock, outside—a man as black as the night itself, with a mask to conceal the features.

"Who in the deuce are you?" the Sport demanded, curiously, for he resolved to know, before allowing the entrance of one who might prove a deadly tool of Munro Malvern.

"Sh! don't make a noise. I am one who has come to release you if we can strike a bargain. I am Nugget Ned, the Knight of the Gulch."

Rosebud Rob gave vent to a low whistle of surprise.

Nugget Ned was not long in picking the lock, after which he opened the door to the cell and stepped inside.

The Sport and the Knight stood confronting each other.

"Sh!" Nugget Ned said, calmly. "Be seated, pray. I wish to speak a few words with you."

Rosebud Rob obeyed quietly. He was determined to hear the fellow through, at all hazards.

"I have a bull's-eye lantern here, but I dare not deal with light in these close quarters," the Knight continued. "Besides, darkness will answer the same purpose. You are Rosebud Rob, are you not?"

"Exactly."

"Very good. As I stated before, I am Nugget Ned. You have heard of me, no doubt?"

"I have, on several occasions."

"Those who spoke of me, endowed me with endearing epithets, no doubt—eh?"

"You have been widely spoken of as a road-agent, sir."

"Ha! ha! they still persist in calling me that. Well, I can scarcely blame them, since they have had a siege of road-agency during the past years. But I am no road-agent, sir, nor am I a robber. For what I came into this country no one knows except myself and *He* who knows everything. I brought with me a band of men who were eager to enter into the life of a miner. We had not been two weeks in the hills, when we made a discovery that we all took an oath not to reveal to the world for a stipulated time. The discovery necessitated our riding through the mountains at nocturnal hours. There was a traitor in our midst, and he was the first to circulate the infamous report that we were a band of road-agents. The report has gained such credence that it would be useless for us to think to vindicate ourselves. There is a spirit working against us—myself in particular—packed by us—myself in particular—packed by us—money than I can

muster. This spirit is invested in the flesh of a man—or a human demon who calls himself a man—and he is equally your enemy and mine, for I speak of Munro Malvern, the mine-owner!"

"Ha! then I am not alone in my hatred for that devil!" Rosebud Rob exclaimed, fiercely. "Go on, sir."

"No, you are not the only one who hates Munro Malvern. Perhaps I have the best cause to hate him of all his foes. But the whys and wherefores matter little to you. It is enough that he is working dead against you. And he is also working against your sister!"

"My sister!" Rosebud Rob gasped, leaping to his feet. "My sister!"

"Ay! your sister. Were you not aware that you had such a relative, young man?"

"Alas! no. I heard that my little sister Jessie died shortly after I fled from my boyhood home."

"Then you have heard wrong. Robert Mapleton brought his daughter with him to the mines, and she is living here in Deadwood since his disappearance a year ago."

"By Heaven! Can this be true? Are you trifling with me, sir, to give me misery?"

"On the contrary, no. Miss Jessie Mapleton is alive, well, and, I may add, the prettiest young lady in the mines."

"And you say that Munro Malvern is working against *her*?"

"With all his power. He has had her arrested for theft, but luckily she got bail; I cannot say as yet how the trial will end."

"And why do you come here to tell me this?" Rosebud Rob demanded, as he arose and paced to and fro, with clinched hands. "I cannot see your object."

"It can easily be explained," Nugget Ned responded. "I have taken a sudden fancy to your sister. I believe her to be good and true, and just such a woman as would suit me for a wife. If I will release you, and work for you to clear you and her and establish you as the rightful heirs to the Big Bullion mine, will you give me your sister's hand in marriage, if I first gain her willing consent to a union with myself?"

"No! ten thousand times, no!" Rosebud Rob cried, fiercely. "I will not sacrifice a helpless woman even to save myself from the hangman's noose. Go! Sir Road-agent! Our interview is at an end!"

Nugget Ned bowed, and without a word left the jail, locking the door behind him.

CHAPTER IX

NUGGET NED ABROAD

THAT honourable member of the Deadwood Bar, Colonel Bill Stokes—the bald-headed beauty of the mines—was on this

same night returning from the upper portion of the city, at the midnight hour, where he had been paying his respects to a certain claim-owning "widder," on whom the gentleman of legal technicalities had cast a matrimonial eye. For the colonel had a particular passion for "widders" with a surplus of cash, and as the one in question was never dead-broke, and was of a gossiping, convivial nature, the colonel often dropped into spend an evening.

And it came to pass that in many instances, when the veteran dispenser of Black Hills jurisprudence wended his way homeward, during the wee sma' hours, he was in a state of happiness that finds expression in bacchanalian song, and while his thoughts wandered aimlessly in the path of melody, his feet and legs were also in the habit of wandering out of a bee-line.

As usual to-night, the colonel was "full" to overflowing with song and melody, as he zigzagged along through a portion of the gulch that was not particularly inviting to the ordinary pedestrian after dark.

"Shut up, you drunken fool! Do you see this?" and, as a masked man suddenly stepped in front of the colonel, the muzzle of a large revolver was thrust under his nose.

But, alas! the good member of the bar had not the power of comprehending very difficult things, and mistaking the glistening deadly tube for the nozzle of one of those glass receptacles from which the innocent toper derives his moisture, a grin of gratitude shot athwart his grotesque features, and with a gracious "thankee," he clasped his lips over the end of the tube with a smack of hugest satisfaction.

But he drew back the next moment, suspiciously, and first eyed the tube, and then the masked man who was holding it in a firm grasp.

"Gone dry, eh?" he queried, with a tipsy leer. "Waal, that is all right!"

The masked Knight seized him rudely by the shoulder and gave him an unceremonious shaking.

"See here, you drunken lout, wake up, or I'll put a bullet through you in quicker time than a cat can sneeze!" the stranger said.

"W-what the devil (hic) 's the matter wi' you?" the colonel gasped. "I hain't got a red cent, ef that's w'at ye're arfter, ye galoot!" for he naturally supposed his assailant to be a road-agent, from his being masked.

"I don't want your money, ye old fool!" the Knight said, sternly. "I want your blood—your life, unless you promise me what I demand!"

And straight on a level with the colonel's heart came the revolver.

"I promise!" that frightened individual gasped. "I promise, ef ye won't salivate me, pilgrim."

"Very well. What I want is this: "There is a prisoner in the Deadwood jail, accused of murder. Do you hear me speaking to you?"

"Ye-s!" Stokes gasped, watching the revolver, suspiciously, and occasionally glancing up at the moon, to assure himself that he was not dreaming.

"Well, this man, Rosebud Rob, is innocent, and must not be lynched, or convicted, even. You must act as his attorney and counsel, and you must so twist your tongue into the intricacies of the law as will result in freeing him. Do you hear, sir?"

"You bet yer (hic) boots. Come, let's g-go take a smile."

"No! hold on! Remember you are to free this man, with such proof as I shall be able to furnish you. If you fail, I'll fill your carcass so full of bullets that you'll answer for a first-class soldering-block. Here, lest you may forget my name—Nugget Ned, the Knight of the Gulch—I'll slip a card in your pocket!"

Which the road-agent cleverly did, after which he darted down the gulch.

The body of Bel Helene, the Pistol Queen, had been taken to the shanty home of one Miles, and assigned a room not occupied by the family, where it was to remain until the trial of the accused murderer, Rosebud Rob.

On this same night, a couple of hours after Nugget Ned's meeting with Colonel Bill, a dark shadow was hovering in the gulch near Miles's cabin.

Ha! now the shadow emerges from a growth of pines, and assumes a more tangible shape—the figure of a man.

Stealing, after a sharp glance around him, across a space of moonlight, he finally gained the dark shadow lying before Miles's shanty. Here he paused again and listened, while his sharp eyes, which were visible through a mask, swept the surroundings.

Having assured himself that there were no other prowlers around, he carefully tried to raise the sash communicating with the dead-room.

Ah! it yielded, and he raised it slowly until it caught and fastened with a spring. This much of the job was accomplished at least.

His next move was to raise himself upon tiptoes, and peer into the apartment. It was wrapped in deep gloom; he could distinguish no single object.

"Ugh! that appetizes!" he muttered, with

not hesitate in this way. I must get in there, and search the clothing worn by the girl at the time of her death. If there is any guilt to be attached to Munro Malvern, curse him! perhaps this search will reveal the clue."

Hesitating no longer he carefully pulled himself upon the window ledge, and in a moment was inside the room.

Before venturing in search of the body, he lowered the window and also a curtain. He next produced a dark lantern, from which he shot the slide, and a bolt of light sprang out with brilliant distinctness.

And now that the darkness was banished, it was easy to see that the nocturnal prowler was the masked Knight, Nugget Ned.

Flashing the light about the room, he perceived the corpse lying upon a blanket on the floor, still robed in the costume worn at the time of the shooting. A pool of blood had coagulated upon the floor, making a ghastly spot.

Setting the lantern upon the floor, Nugget Ned knelt beside the corpse and proceeded to make a hasty search of the clothing. It was a ghastly job at the best, and he was in no mood to linger long in company with a dead body.

Each pocket he examined hastily; then, a thought striking him, he felt in the bosom of the dress.

An exclamation burst from his lips: a newly-written sheet of paper rewarded his search.

Hastily holding it before the light, he read the contents, a deadly glitter gradually stealing into his eyes. It seemed to be part of an unfinished letter in pencil writing, and read:

"DEADWOOD, July—, 187—.

"I have found the man I am searching for—the man who ruined me and murdered my father. I am not positive—I saw him to-day, and am *almost* sure 'tis he. They call him Munro Malvern, and he is rich. I will find out, and if it is Garyl Sanderson, my knife shall drink his heart's blood, for he would murder me if he should find that I am here. I will go now and test the matter."

This was all, but it was enough to cause a chuckle from Nugget Ned.

"The very proof that I wanted!" he muttered.

Storing the paper in his pocket, the masked knight prepared to leave the dead-room.

Casting a parting glance at the corpse, and then stealing cautiously toward the ^{lan-}tern, he shot the slide back over the ^{to} ^{row-} ^{all} was dark. He was about to ^{tain} preparatory to raising

the window, when he heard a noise that caused him suddenly to become motionless and silent.

There was a sound against the window-pane, as if some person were searching for some place to get a hold whereby to raise the sash.

"Ha! there is some one trying to gain entrance to the room, like myself!" Nugget Ned muttered under his breath.

"Who is it, and what object have they in coming here? Ah! perhaps it is Munro Malvern, coming to remove anything from the body that might throw suspicion upon him. I will get back in the shadow, and see!"

The faint noise at the window continued for some time; then the sash was cautiously raised, and a few moments later a man drew himself up and dropped into the room.

"Ah, 'tis darker than the shades of Hades!" he muttered, in a hoarse tone. "I should have brought a lantern, for 'tis accursed spookish business, this searching dead bodies after dark. I will search the body, and hasten to leave the place, all the same."

"Hold! Munro Malvern—you need not go to that trouble," hissed a low, stern voice; then there suddenly shot a bolt of light upon the figure of the mine-owner, and a revolver muzzle was thrust forward directly into his face.

"Hist! not a word aloud, or I'll blow your brains out."

The millionaire reeled back, with an oath, fraught with terror.

"Who are you?" he gasped.

"One who has sworn to hound you down to the death, Munro Malvern, demon that you are!" the Knight of the Gulch replied, in a fierce whisper.

"What do you want?" Malvern gasped, hoarsely. "What are you in this room for? I will raise an alarm——"

"Dare to do it, and I'll blow your brains out, as sure as I am accused of being a road-agent!" Nugget Ned said, viciously. "Go, now, and don't attempt any more of this after-dark villainy, as you will surely be found out. Go! I say, and my revolver will attend your exit!"

With another bitter curse the baffled man turned, and sprang out of the window, with the Knight at his heels.

"You shall pay dearly for this!" he hissed, shaking his clinched fist savagely at this man, who had been a bloodhound upon his trail.

"Go!" said Nugget Ned. "I will cover you with my revolver, as long as you are in sight and range. Go, I say, without another word."

Malvern obeyed. He foresaw that it

could do him no good to resist, when the implacable Knight had the drop upon him. He accordingly turned with a growl, and strode away down the street. Nugget Ned watched him until he had disappeared from view, then he too left the vicinity, and the night crept on toward the break of another day.

Munro Malvern returned to his own mansion, in a state of almost savage ferocity.

CHAPTER X

PERSIMMON BILL'S STORY

THE millionaire threw himself upon a couch and tried to snatch a few hours of sleep; but it was impossible.

His guilty conscience worked against his desire, and though he closed his eyes, no slumber visited him; he was conscious of everything. Memories, and evidently unpleasant ones, came surging back upon him, until at last, just at daybreak, he leaped to his feet in a state bordering upon desperation.

"Curse it! I am all unstrung!" he muttered, resorting to the brandy bottle for solace. "Ha! is that you, Brass? What calls you out of your bed so early?"

"Pardon, mass'r, but a gen'man left a letter for you, an' sez as how I was to give you his respects!" Brass replied, handing a large sealed envelope to the mine-owner, and then retiring.

"Who can this be from?" Malvern muttered, turning to a window.

He tore it open, half-suspiciously.

As he pulled out a sheet of paper a photograph in cabinet size fell to the floor. With an ejaculation of surprise, he stooped and picked it up. A glance at the picture—then he staggered back with a frightful oath which ended in a horrified shriek of terror, and the photograph fluttered to the floor. He gasped, and staggered to a seat, his eyes fixed glaringly upon the object on the carpet.

The man was in a frightful state. He appeared like a madman, so fiendish was the expression of his features and eyes, as, crouching upon his hands and knees, he crept slowly toward the picture, as if he were afraid to touch it, lest it should dissolve into something that would annihilate him.

Every nerve in his frame seemed strung at the tightest tension—he was in a spell of terror bordering on actual frenzy.

Now! he reaches the picture, and with a low gasping growl, not unlike some mad beast, he gazes down at the scene which is photographed upon the card.

'Tis not a scene calculated to inspire any man with pleasant emotions, much less to the crime-haunted mine-owner, around whom the meshes of the retributive net

are gradually gathering; nor is it a scene that often occurs on ordinary photographs.

It is of a room, in the centre of which a coffin is placed upon the support of a pair of trestles. The lid is removed, and, wrapped in a shroud, there lies within the coffin the form and deathly face of a woman.

Beside the coffin is another figure—that of a boy, not yet in his teens.

He kneels, with hands clasped and eyes upraised toward heaven, as if taking an oath.

The features of both the boy and the corpse are distinct and recognizable to one who had seen the originals in life.

Munro Malvern *had* seen them, and recognized the dead face now, with a horrified oath.

Persimmon Bill, the scout, whom we have casually mentioned in previous chapters, was a man with whom few in the city of Deadwood cared to meddle. He was stern and reticent, and was unpopular among the majority.

He put in a share of his time in the mines, where he owned a small pan-claim; or, when an opportunity offered, went as a guide with some exploring expedition or emigrant caravan.

Among those whom he counted his friends was the eccentric dare-devil, Baltimore Bess. They had met many times, and became as brother and sister to each other. Persimmon Bill had watched her observantly, only to learn that she was "all on the square." He was not doing this for motives of matrimonial inclination as may be supposed, but for reasons which he made known to her this same day, which was to be the trial day both of Jessie Mapleton for theft, and Rosebud Rob for murder.

He had seen the dare-devil enter the "Little Brown Jug," and he followed her there, to find her engaged in conversation with Kentucky Jake, the red-nosed proprietor.

But she turned with a pleasant smile as she saw the scout.

"Is et you, Persimmon? What's gone wrong with your traps, old fellow!"

"Nothing, Baltimore, only I came to have a little talk with you—something a little private, you see," the scout replied, taking a retired seat by a deal table.

"You probably know that this is the day of the trial of Rosebud Rob, for murder," he said. "In my opinion it's going to give the poor fellow a close rub for the limb of a tree. The man Malvern has no end of money, as the Big Bullion mine, alone, is yielding him something above a thousand a week."

"Yas, et's goin' hard for the Sport," Baltimore Bess said, gazing moodily at the floor. "An' he war a cool sort of 'co

wi' plenty o' fun in him, when et cum ter fun."

"You are right, when you say that there is fun in him. If he had not got into this murder trap, there'd have been a new proprietor for the Big Bullion mine, I'm thinkin' I say this as an admirer of the Sport—for he regards me as a being less than a man, all because of a little matter between us up in Cinnamon gulch. As usual, of course, there was a woman in it, you see !

"Another person ran away and left me in such a position as was a reflection of dishonour, and after that Rosebud Rob very justly cut' my acquaintance. On coming here to Deadwood I was accidentally placed in charge of some papers which I have found relate to Rosebud Rob, and will no doubt be the means of clearing him from Judge Lynch's noose. I have been studying for some time if I could trust you with the possession of these papers, as I do not wish to hold them, and am not over eager to present them to the Sport in person. I have found that you were trusty, and I now wish to place them in your hands, that you may give them over into the hands of Rosebud Rob's counsel."

"What ! give anything of the value of a pin into the hands of the colonel ?" Bess exclaimed. "Not much fer Maloney ! I'll just plead a part o' thet same case myself, providin' you give me the papers."

"Very well—do as you will. Here are the papers ; and if my eyes are not at fault, you'll make them count advantageously for Rosebud Rob. Now, good-bye, for I am off as guide of a train to Big Butte creek. Give my respects to Rosebud Rob, and my hopes that he may escape from the toils of his foe."

Then, shaking hands with Bess, the scout shouldered his rifle and left the tavern, first having left a package of papers upon the table.

CHAPTER XI

IN COURT AND SCENES THEREOF

THE coming trial of Rosebud Rob had elicited much interest among the Deadwoodites. Principally, because a trial for murder was an uncommon event, as nine times out of ten the murderer escaped, and if caught at all was informally lynched by the vigilantes.

But, here was a case for which the accused was to stand up and receive trial, and be dealt with accordingly, as the law might see fit.

By noon all the space in the court-room, that was available, was filled, and an eager, restive multitude surged outside.

Such space as was necessary for those concerned in the trials had been fenced off, to keep back the crowd.

Judge Jacob sat in state in the judge's stand, prepared for the duties of the day. Adolphus Cole, clerk of court, had a seat and desk directly beneath the shadow of the judicial throne, and upon either side of him were tables for the legal fraternity, who were to "argy the case."

Of these latter Colonel Bill Stokes was to be the defendants' counsel, both for Rosebud Rob and Jessie Mapleton. The case of the former was not to be called until the larceny case had been tried.

Munro Malvern, realizing that he must make a strong last effort in order to save himself, had engaged a lawyer who had won several suits of late, and was considered good authority on legal matters.

At the hour for the trial of Jessie Mapleton, Sheriff Shelby led her into the courtroom, and gave her a chair, after which he took one close at hand. There were also present Hickory Hank and his three pals, the dare-devil, Baltimore Bess, and the cinnamon-haired proprietor of the "Little Brown Jug," Kentucky Jake, and a man in black with a mask upon his face.

Shortly after, Munro Malvern entered, accompanied by his attorney, a man of villainous countenance, named Small ; his dutiful stepson, Lamont, and the coloured servitor, Brass.

After they were seated, the judge took a nip from a bottle which ornamented his pulpit, and which bore a flaring label, "Deadly Poison !"

Then, with a commanding ahem ! he arose, and glared down upon those below him, grandly.

"Silence !" shouted Adolphus Syringus Cole, rising and rapping upon the table. "I call order. The case will now be opened by the Right Honourable Judge Schriener, from the nine hundred and sixth Congressional district. Order, all ! I have the honour of introducing his Excellency !"

"Dot's me !" the worthy judge announced, "dot's me, der shudge mit dis a'gust shury. Veller citizens, I vas most happy ter call up von case vich demands a heap of consideration—dat is ter sav, der case off Miss Shessie Mapleton, accused of larceny mit our distinguished townsmen, Mr. Munro Malvern. Mr. Sheriff, you vill conduct der trial, ef you blease, an' der first man dat lies, you shoot him deadt—I'll pack you !"

Shelby arose with a bow, and turned to Munro Malvern.

"Have you all your witnesses, sir ?"

"I have. They consist of Grim, Haysed Jim, Holv Moses, and Popular Pete, besides myself and stepson, Mr. Lamont," the millionaire replied, triumphantly.

"And this coloured chap ?"

Oh! he comes on in this next case."

"Ah!" and Shelby turned to Colonel Bill. "Mr. Stokes, what have you on the defence?"

Stokes arose with a bow.

"Ef ye please, Mr. Sheriff, thet shinin' beatitude o' ther female firmament, Baltimore Bess."

"I object!" cried Munro Malvern.

"Silence!" roared the judge. "Clerk, fine dot man fife dollars for contempt mit der court!"

"Bess ar' one!" continued the colonel. "Then, thar is thet honest, law-abidin' citizen, Kentucky Jake, he's another. Then, there's the masked chap who calls himself Nugget Ned——"

"Stop! that man is a road-agent, and shall not testify!" cried Munro Malvern, furiously.

"Silence!" roared the judge. "Clerk, fine dot man fife dollars. Mr. Malvern, I pet you swi' drinks vot you lie. Dot man vill testify, ef der old court knows herself."

"Don't that make three?" the colonel cried; "then hayr's ernuther witness in my own beautiful individuality."

"Five witnesses for the prosecution and five for the defence, myself included!" Shelby announced. "Mr. Small, I believe you open the prosecution."

"I do in a brief and concise manner for my client, Mr. Malvern!" Small announced, loftily. "Indeed, I feel assured that there is need of but little argument to convince the most honourable judge that the accused is deserving of punishment."

"It appears," added the lawyer for the prosecution, "that the Right Honourable Mr. Malvern was enticed into the house of the defendant on the afternoon of the —th instant, for purposes of consummating a rascally scheme."

"It appears, he was treated to liquor, and it being drugged, he was stupefied."

"While in this state his pockets were rifled of a package of money, amounting to a thousand dollars; and that package was found since, in under the carpet in the defendant's room, by the sberiff, here, and Messrs. Grim, Moses, and two others. I believe that is a plain statement of the case, Mr. Judge, and I appeal to you to consider it, and deal with the culprit as she justly deserves. If you like, Mr. Malvern will take oath."

"Silence! I would not dake dot shyster's oath mit a pack of Biple so higher as my head!" cried Schriener. "Bill Stokes, you swear dem vitnesses for der brosecution. Clerk of der Court, put down every syllable vot dey say."

Hickory Hank took the stand, and, after being sworn, testified in effect that

he and his pards were crossing the gulch on the afternoon of the theft, and seeing the defendant beckon the prosecutor to enter her shanty, they smelt a rat, and crept to a window to watch, and saw the defendant sit upon the lap of the party of the prosecution and tempt him with liquor, until he was in a maudlin state, after which she took a package of bills from his pocket; then supporting him to the door, pushed him headforemost into the street.

Witness and pards had picked party of prosecution up, and supported him home, where, upon becoming once more himself, he had missed the money.

Hayseed Jim, Holy Moses, and popular Pete were next sworn, and testified to the same as Hickory Hank.

"Is the counsel for the defence satisfied?" Small demanded, triumphantly.

"Nary a time!" replied Colonel Bill, mounting his table as he began to warm up to his work. "Nary a time, ye leetle spindle-shanked flunkey! Now, in this case, Mr. Hickory Hank Grim, w'at hour was et thet Mr. Malvern entered the house of Miss Mapleton?"

"Half after two, perzactly, as I remember lukin' at my watch!" Grim replied, rather nervously.

"Aire thet karect, Mr. Malvern?"

"Certainly!" was the reply.

"Grim, w'at time war et when Mr. Malvern issued forth from Miss Mapleton's place of residence, in the manner you describe?"

"Exactly a quarter o' three!"

"Then, he was inside the presence o' ther defendant just fifteen minutes, eh? Well, I suppose you went d'rect hum wi' ther party o' ther prosecution?"

"Y-yes!"

"What time did you arrive there?"

"At ten minutes to three."

"Mr. Malvern, ar' thes karect?"

"Quite so!"

"Mr. Lamont wull please be swore!"

Lamont testified that he was at the door when Grim brought the prosecutor home, in an insensible and drunken state, and that on waking he had missed the money.

"Is thet all ther testimony you hev ter offer fer ther prosecution, Mr. Small, or w'atever yer name is?" Colonel Bill demanded.

"I believe it is," was the reply; and it is strong enough that no sane jury ought to pause for deliberation in rendering a verdict.

"Don' you vas be too sure apoud dot," cried the judge. "It so happens dot I pe shudge mit dis shury, unt I am capable of rendering von verdict. Defendant, we will now hear from you."

"In behalf of Miss Mapleton, said Sheriff Shelby, rising, "I will say that we have proof that the testimony given before this court by the witnesses of the prosecution amounts to a pack of base, damnable lies. Mr. Small, you are at liberty to swear the witnesses for the defence."

Baltimore Bess was then sworn.

"Shelby ar' purty much right," she said. "Et's a hull devilish plot o' Munro Malvern ter ruin this young woman, because she refused to marry him. It was I who chanced ter overheer ther interview 'twixt Miss Mapleton and Malvern. I see'd him go inter ther shanty, and, out o' curiosity, I played spy, and, as it appears, quite fortunately. Malvern had called to offer her money, which he claimed was due her frum an interest w'ich her father hed hed in some claim or other, up in Thunder gulch. Miss Mapleton had just received a letter purporting to come from her father, in which certain charges ag'in' this Malvern were cleared up. In gratitude she finally consented to receive the money, but she hed scarcely done so when Malvern offers ter make her his wife."

"It is an accursed lie!" Munro Malvern cried, springing savagely toward the dare-devil, only to be hurled back by Shelby. "It is——"

"Silence!" roared the judge from his box. "Clerk, fine dot feller ten dollars und costs."

"Miss Mapleton scornfully refused ther cuss," continued Baltimore Bess, "w'en his motives becum plain, an' she ordered him from ther house. He went, swearin' ter hev revenge. I see'd him leave the house, an' he warn't pitched out nuther, nor was he drunk. They had drunk no licker tergether, for Miss Mapleton ain't that kind o' a hair-pin, ye bet yer boots! Hank Grim nor his pals warn't nowhar around w'en Munro Malvern entered an' left Miss Mapleton's shanty."

Malvern paced up and down the floor, cursing like a madman, for he saw that the dare-devil's testimony was dead against him.

"Is that all you have to say?" Small demanded, sternly.

"Not quite. I saw Munro Malvern walk toward his house, and enter."

"How about the time, as given by Grim, young woman?"

"Wal, as ter that, the time o' Malvern's entering and leaving Miss Mapleton's place, et war purty much correct. But Grim war nowhar in the neighbourhood at ther time."

Kentucky Jake was next sworn, and gave his testimony.

"Hickory Hank war in my saloon, ther

'Little Brown Jug,' for fifteen minutes, commencing at half-past two. They drank, an' then Grim whispered to his pals, and left. I follered him to ther door, an' see'd him go up ther street an' enter Malvern's house. Chancin' to look down ther street, I see'd Malvern cum out o' Miss Mapleton's, an' go ter his own place. He warn't no more drunk than I am. That's ther end o' my testermentary."

"Nugget Ned," said Sheriff Shelby, "have you any information to offer in this matter?"

"Not a great deal in this case, but more in the case to come," the young Knight of the Gulch replied. "You all have known me, and counted me a road-agent. But you have been mistaken. My business in the Black Hills is mainly to hunt down a murderer to death—not to kill him with weapons, but to hound him to the gallows. I am a man of the night and day. I go and come whenever and wherever I please."

"I chanced to be in the mansion of Munro Malvern *after* his return from Miss Mapleton's. This ruffian, Hickory Hank, was also there. I played the part of spy, and overheard a plot between Munro Malvern and Grim, to the effect that the latter was to do as has been done—that is, arrest Miss Mapleton on the charge of the theft of the money, which he, Malvern had given her. I even overheard Malvern plot to himself how he would visit the young lady in her cell, and offer to procure her release if she would marry him!"

As the Knight finished, loud yells of indignation arose on the air from the spectators; revolvers flashed at every hand; all was excitement of the most intense nature.

"Silence!" roared the judge, mounting the extreme top of his judicial pulpit, and waving his hands to enjoin the silence he would establish. "Silence, I dole you. Yust make so much noise ag'in mit dis court-room, as der drop off a pin, unt I plow you all ter dunder mit my revolver. Dot's der kind off a hand-organ I am!"

"Hooray! them's my philosoffikle thoughts, too," put in Colonel Bill, with a victorious pigeon-cut on top of his table. "Yer most august and excellent honourable judge, ye've heerd ther testimony given on fu'st one side, then on t'other, an' we do most cheerfully submit it ter ye fer considerashun!"

"Shimminy Shackson! I discharge der case," cried the judge. "Mr. Sheriff, der prisoner is free to go. She didn't stole anydings, as has been clearly proven. Arrest dot man, Munro Malvern; I fine him a hundred dollars for dryin' der sheat de lady out of her garacter."

"Miss Mapleton will remain until after the trial of her brother," Shelby said. "Mr. Malvern! will you pay the fines imposed upon you or stand arrest?"

"I'll pay them" the foiled villain said, taking out his purse. "Please to tell me the whole amount."

"Swi hundredt dollars covers all t'e fines, an der costs mit der suit," announced the judge, taking a swig from his "p'izen" bottle.

Munro Malvern was deathly white with rage, as he counted out the bills and gave them to Shelby.

"Now, Miss Mapleton," he said, as he turned toward Jessie. "since you have beat me at my own game, be kind enough to name what sum of money will repay you for the dishonour reflected upon you by this public trial."

Jessie arose to her feet, trembling in every limb, and threw back the veil which had hitherto covered her face.

"Sir!" she said, her tones quivering and eyes flashing, "I would scorn to touch a straw which had been in your villainous hands. Your baseness and evil designs have freely been illustrated to all present."

She took her seat again midst stormy applause. For the spectators were warm in their sympathy for her; while, for Munro Malvern, a strong tide of anger was arising among the crowd within and without the building—and there were councils among knots of miners, and expressions and threats passed which boded no good for the wealthy arch-schemer.

"You have triumphed!" Munro Malvern said, bitterly, "and I acknowledge myself foiled. But, mind you, your triumph is but transient. On the impending murder case, I shall be able to strike you a blow, wherein there need be no false testimony. Ha! ha!"

And with a villainous laugh he turned and left the court-room.

"Fifteen minutes for refreshments, before der odder case comes on!" announced the judge, and, as a consequence, there was a promiscuous scattering and the room was cleared of all save Sheriff Shelby, Jessie, Baltimore Bess and the Gulch Knight, Nugget Ned.

CHAPTER XII

A CELEBRATED CASE

If the court-room had been full during the trial of Jessie Mapleton it was packed nearly to suffocation now, and it was with difficulty that Sheriff Shelby entered with the prisoner. A murmur of applause emanated from either hand, as the Sport stood proudly erect in the space allotted to him, a cool, defiant smile upon his face.

It was evident he had more friends than enemies in the vast throng.

There was one noticeable fact, also, that a number of the men within the room were attired and masked the same as Nugget Ned.

Munro Malvern had been one of the first to notice this fact, and he trembled as he caught the stern, piercing gaze of the Knight of the Gulch.

It was the same out in the thronged street as in the court-room. These masked men had suddenly made their appearance in undesirable numbers—from whence no one knew. All were armed, and they were too numerous for a thought to be entertained of their arrest as road-agents.

Inside the court-room the trial was about to begin.

Judge Schriner occupied his judicial pulpit with grand dignity. Likewise did Adolphus Syringus Cole and Col. Bill Stokes sit like statues of justice at their respective tables.

The witnesses were disposed of in positions facing his Honour.

"Shentlemon mit der shury!" said the judge, arising, "dis cose must be tried shorter ash quick, vor der day ish openin' his arms to embrace der night. Ve vill hear vot der prisoner has ter say."

"Mr. Sheriff, you will swear all off dose witnesses pefore any destimony ish given."

Accordingly the strongest oath in the Black Hills jurisprudence was administered to the Sport, Rosebud Rob, and to Munro Malvern, Lamont, Brass, Baltimore Bess, Nugget Ned, and Persimmon Bill.

Rosebud Rob then took the stand, without the least visible embarrassment, and glanced at every person present before he spoke.

"I don't know as what I have to say will produce any marked effect!" he remarked, a little smile hovering about his face. "A man accused of murder is not to be generally believed in giving testimony. What I have to say can be said in a very few moments, I was coming down from my boarding-place, the night of the murder. It was late, but I was in a restless state, and I concluded to go down to the Mabelle, to see what was going on. When I had arrived in the neighbourhood of Munro Malvern's house, before which it seems the murder occurred, I heard a pistol shot, but attached no great importance to it, as they are frequent sounds here in the mines. I walked on, and just in front of Malvern's house I stumbled over a body lying in the middle of the road. In horror I stopped by it, never once thinking that I was in a suspicious position. I even picked up the revolver, with which the crime had been committed, from the road where it had been left. I wiped off the dust

and endeavoured to find if it was marked, but could make out nothing in the moonlight. At this moment Sheriff Shelby, here, and several others came up, and just then, Munro Malvern stepped from his mansion and accused me of the crime, saying he had seen me commit it. That is the extent of my testimony, except that I may add that, being the son of the late Robert Mapleton, I was searching into my father's affairs, with the suspicion that he was the real owner of the Big Bullion mine. Malvern knew this, and probably foresaw a good chance to get rid of a dangerous claimant by charging me with the murder of the Pistol Queen."

A deafening shout of applause rent the air, as the Sport concluded his simple testimony.

It was evident where the general sympathy was.

Munro Malvern next took the stand.

"On the night of the murder I was not sleepy, and sat at my window till past my usual bedtime, looking down upon the street. At last, growing tired, I partly undressed, then, hearing a noise upon the street, I glanced once more from my window. I saw a female figure running up the gulch, from the direction of the 'Eucher Deck' place, closely pursued by a man. Just in front of my place he overtook and grasped her by the shoulder.

"She attempted to scream, but he clutched her by the throat, and drawing a revolver, shot her through the heart. In horror I rushed down to the street, to find that Sheriff Shelby had already arrived on the spot. The murderer I had recognized from the window as the Sport who styles himself Rosebud Rob."

"I pet fife dollars vot dot vas a pig lie," declared the judge, excitedly. "Mr. Sheriff, we will hear from you."

"My testimony amounts to but little," Shelby replied. "I heard the pistol-shot, and hastened to the spot, to find the prisoner standing by the body, with a revolver in his grasp. He denied that he had aught to do with the murder, and submitted to arrest."

"It is simply useless to proceed further with this case," cried Munro Malvern, with a smile of diabolical triumph, "as sufficient proof has been shown that Rosebud Rob was the murderer. I propose that we hurry him out, and hoist him to a tree. Hurrah! what do you say? Or, if you want more, here is my coloured servant who witnessed the act, and also my step-son, Mr. Ralph Lamont."

"Shut up!" roared his honour. "Clerk, fine dot man finf un swanzy dollars an' costs. Ve will hear every vitness, ef der old court knows goot lager, unt ve dink she do."

Brass, the servant, next took the stand.

He was very much scared, evidently, for the whites of his eyes rolled ludicrously, especially when he caught a threatening glance from the masked knight, Nugget Ned.

"Dis yere nigger see'd her murder, fo' suah, an' he's goin' ter make a clean breast of it. I went to bed about haff an hour before de t'ing happened, but, hearin' de massa up, I slid out an' went downstairs. I see'd de massa standin' nigh up to de hall door, but he didn't see dis chile, nohow. Purty soon, de key turns in de lock, an' de door dun slam open. Den dis chile shore see de massa thrust a pistol for'a'd, an' shute de gal. He catch her, an' drag her into de street, den run back in de house, an' pull off his coat an' boots like as if he done jes' got up out o' bed. Purty soon he go out in de street, an' accuse de chap wid de rosebud o' murder in de fu'st degree. Shuah, dot's eberyting dis nigger knows. 'cept dat massa wanted me to sw'ar 'g'in de Sport."

The sensation was great.

Shouts of indignation rose on every hand, and died into a sullen, hissing groan.

Munro Malvern, who had been instantly seized and handcuffed by Sheriff Shelby, raved and swore like a madman.

"Ten thousand curses!" he roared, in furious rage. "'Tis all a damnable plot to ruin me. That black devil has been bribed to swear against me!"

"Silence!" yelled his Honour, between sundry nips at the "p'izen" bottle—"silence! Let der case go on. Ve vill haff a thorough hearing mit dis matter, so sure ash I pe von gran' shudge. Nugget Ned, take der stand."

The Knight of the Gulch complied, his black eyes glittering, keenly.

"The darkey told the truth. Munro Malvern undoubtedly did murder the girl!" he said. "I have here a paper which I obtained from my secret search of the dead girl's person, last night. It is to the effect that the young lady was to start on a search for the man who murdered her father and ruined herself. This person she believed to be Malvern, as he is here known, and she was going to pay him a visit to find out for certain. Here is the document, Sheriff. Furthermore, in testimony, I would add, I was on the spot at the time Rosebud Rob was arrested by Sheriff Shelby. At the time of Shelby's arrival, the Sport dropped the revolver, which he claims to have found near the body, and drew a pair of his own. But, on being accused by Malvern, it seems he concluded to surrender, and dropped his weapons. So that, after the crowd had dispersed, I made it my business to pick up all three weapons. Here they are, now,"

and he laid the three weapons upon the table. "The two last dropped by Rosebud Rob, bear his own name, Robert Mapleton. The other one bears the name of—*Munro Malvern!*"

Examination proved this to be correct.

White, and speechless at the crushing evidence being brought against him, Munro Malvern had sunk upon a chair, where he was closely guarded by Shelby.

"Is this all, witness?" the sheriff asked.

"Not quite!" Nugget Ned replied, tearing off his mask, and revealing a handsome young face, with regular features, and piercing black eyes.

"Let me discard my *nom de plume*, and introduce myself to you as Captain Ephraim Sanderson, a detective, and the son of the man whom you have known as Munro Malvern. His real name is Garyl Sanderson. The murder of the girl here has not been the first one he has committed. Years ago he married a girl in Montgomery, Alabama, for her money. The bride and her brother were the only heirs to vast money-wealth, and the bride came into her portion of the fortune five years after her marriage with Garyl Sanderson. During that time yonder villain hovered at her side, anything but a dutiful husband; but no sooner had she received her money, than he murdered her in cold blood, and fled with the whole amount in his possession. I chanced to be the only result of their unhappy union, and was, at the time, about four years of age.

"The murderer fled and escaped. My uncle, Leslie Carrollton, spent nearly the best part of his fortune in trying to find him. Immediately after the murder he caused me to take an oath over my mother's coffin, and he caused the scene to be painted, and a photograph was afterwards taken of it.

"He stayed with me, or rather took me with him, for eight long years of search. But, at the age of twelve, he sent me out upon the world, well supplied with money, and bound by a terrible oath never to stop going until I had hunted my own father down to death.

"I have kept my oath; I have been a sleuth upon his track; I have known his whereabouts for a year past, but have been watching a chance to nab him. Here are two warrants for his arrest as a murderer, but, as he can hang but once, they are useless. Now, I have done my work!"

And, replacing his mask, the Knight-detective left the room amid wild shouts. In ten minutes more, neither he nor the other masked men were in sight.

"I have a little matter to fix here," said Persimmon Bill, stepping forward. "You are all aware that a miner, Robert Maple-

ton, by name, disappeared in a mysterious manner somewhat over a year ago. He was a quiet, unobtrusive man and very few knew anything about his affairs. Everybody supposed that he had got tired of labouring at such claims as he had, and had gone off to search for richer fields. Probably, none out of a hundred would have believed that he had been murdered. Yet, such was the case. I accidentally came upon his body, after he had been shot in a half a dozen places through the body. He was not dead yet, and gasped out to me a confession which I took down.

"He stated that he owned a tract of land which only that day he and his pard in some other dealings, had discovered to be vastly rich in mineral ore. Upon finding this his companion, Munro Malvern, had decoyed him into the lonely confine of the mountains, and shot him. Bess, please hand the package I gave to you, to Mr. Shelby."

The sheriff examined the several documents, and then said:

"The witness is undoubtedly right. The confession is the late miner's own, I feel certain, because I have been able to gather its several facts from persons who knew him. The other papers are a will, leaving the property known as the Big Bullion mine to Miss Jessie Mapleton with the exception of a dollar, which is to go to a truant son, named Robert, should he turn up. There is, also, a deed of the Big Bullion property to the late owner."

"Der court is dismissed!" announced the judge. "Rosebud Rob pe free, an' Munro Malvern he go mit der shail, unt be hanged mit der neck, ter-morrow, ondil he ish deader as sixty-swi door nails. Such is shustice in dis city of Deadwood mit der Black Hills."

Accordingly, there was a general leaving of the seat of justice.

Sheriff Shelby had the honour of escorting Munro Malvern back to the cell but recently occupied by the Sport, Rosebud Rob, who now was free to escort his sister, with whom he had previously had an interview, to her humble but cosy home, where of course there was a gladsome reunion.

And among those invited to a pretty little supper were they who had testified in behalf of the two children of the late miner. They were the worthy judge of the court, and the festive Colonel Stokes, along with Baltimore Bess, Persimmon Bill, the negro, Brass, Kentucky Jake, and several others.

Sheriff Shelby dropped in, and was warmly received by both Rosebud Rob and Jessie—especially by the latter, who saw much to admire in the stalwart, handsome man, who had proven himself a generous friend.

And there was a gladsome time within the little shanty home. The party were at the supper-table, when there came a knock upon the door; it opened, and Nugget Ned stood inside the apartment.

CHAPTER XIII

VENGEANCE

"Do not let me disturb you, pray!" the Knight said, pleasantly. "I merely dropped in to see if you were enjoying yourselves, after the scenes of the trial."

"Let me assure you that we are!" Rosebud Rob said, rising and advancing with extended hands.

"Shake, Sir Knight, and at the same time accept my strongest thanks for your efforts in my behalf. You did act nobly for me, and I welcome you as a guest at my sister's board."

"I can tarry but a moment, thank you," Nugget Ned replied. "One more job, and then the Black Hills country has seen the last of me and my so-styled Knights. Before I go, I have a gift for some one among you, and I know of none more deserving than you, Mr. Mapleton. Since you have been ignored in your late father's will, here is a map of the Black Hills, with directions for finding one of the richest shaft mines which the world has ever known. I freely give it to you, and bequeath to you the control of the army of men whom you will find working the mine any time you may visit it."

"They are all bound by oath to serve me, and never disband until by universal consent. You must, therefore, mask yourself, that they may never know that you are not me. All depends upon your maintaining the secret. You can become a rich man, if you play the game honestly, under disguise. That is all, sir. I wish you all happiness and unalloyed bliss for the remainder of your lives, and that no scheming rascal may ever try to put you into a criminal court, as has my villainous father!"

Then, turning upon his heel, the Knight suddenly left the shanty.

Rosebud Rob sprang after him, but too late. He had vanished from sight.

The little gathering at the shanty finally broke up, and all but the brother and sister dispersed to their various places of abode.

It was when the brilliant spectral light of the midnight moon streamed over the pine-crested mountain-tops into the golden gulch, that the city of Deadwood was

aroused into a great commotion, such as it rarely had known before.

Out of the gulch at either end of the town dashed what seemed to be an army of masked men, with wild yells and shouts. Here they come, now rushing in a great body of cavalry, down into the centre of the main street, where they meet in front of the stone jail wherein is confined the murderer, Munro Malvern. From a thousand points the astonished Deadwoodites look on.

They do not raise a hand to stay this strange band, for they recognize Nugget Ned at the head, and of the masked Knights of the Gulch there is such a swarm, that it would seem an act of madness to attack them with a hope of preventing the lynching.

Besides, very careless are these people of Deadwood how a criminal dies, or by whose hands, so long as "he gits sent off in good shape."

Hark! Nugget rises in his stirrups, and his tones, clear as an Alpine horn, ring through the gulch:

"Bring forth the prisoner, and hang him to the limb of the handiest tree. Though he is my father, I will not show so vile a man mercy."

There was a commotion—several of the Knights had dismounted and entered the jail.

At this minute the prisoner was led out, amid wild shouts from the Knight-Vigilantes, and strung up to a tree in plain sight.

Then, upon the call of a horn, they all dashed off down the gulch, headed by the man who called himself Nugget Ned, and were seen no more.

When the citizens arrived at the scene of the lynching, and cut down the body, the spirit of Munro Malvern, *alias* Garyl Sanderson, had taken its flight.

And pinned to his breast was a copy of the strange photograph which the guilty man had received previous to the trial and his crushing defeat.

It was an emblem of man's enmity toward man; it told the strange, truthful tale of a son's hatred, and his trailing of a criminal father down to death.

Few that gazed upon the stiffening body could say that they were sorry.

A little more will complete the story.

The bodies of Munro Malvern and Bel Helene were buried on the following day.

True to his word, Nugget Ned was not seen again in the vicinity of Deadwood, and where he seeks a new field for exploits can only be a matter of conjecture.

THE END

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